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OF

THE LAST HALF-CENTURY.

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IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. II.

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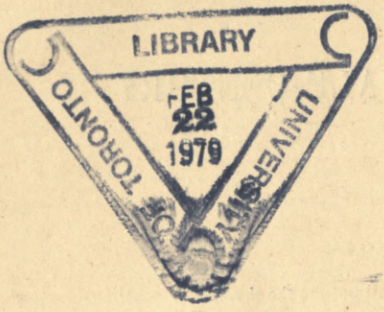

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ERRATUM.

Vol. i. p. 268.—Mdlle. de Meric—now Mdme. de Meric-Lablache—was the daughter of Madame de Meric-Lalande, and not of Mdme. de Meric. See vol. ii. p. 299.

MUSICAL RECOLLECTIONS OF THE LAST HALF CENTURY.

CHAPTER I.

1836–37.

THE operatic season of 1836 presented a series of even less interesting performances than those of the previous year; the only event of any significance being the *début* of Mdme. Colleoni-Corti and Signor Cartagenova,* the opera selected for their introduction (Saturday, March 6th) to an English audience being *La Straniera*, one of Bellini's earliest and weakest inventions. To the lady, who was engaged merely as a temporary *prima donna* until the return of Grisi, an unexpected welcome was accorded, simply because she was the only novelty worth consideration since her more successful rival had taken the town, as it were, by storm, in 1834. Mdme. Colleoni-Corti was gifted with a pleasing face, and possessed a good figure, which she understood how to employ to histrionic advantage. Her singing, too, was pronounced to be "of a sound Italian style,"

* Jean-Horace Cartagenova made his first appearance at Venice in 1825; and died at Vicenza, Sept. 26, 1841. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. ii. p. 196.

although her voice was thin and harsh, and only moderately extensive in compass, and when put forth in *sforzandi* and the highest notes of the scale, was more piercing than pleasing. She executed her music carefully, a qualification which also assisted in producing a favourable impression. Of the two *débutantes*, the gentleman most certainly obtained the larger amount of approbation; for he possessed a full rich baritone, which, if not so flexible as Tamburini's, was certainly the sweeter of the two in its tones. Of his execution very little could be said in his favour. With every qualification to make a finished singer, his method was rough and unpolished, and this defect was not overcome by his acting, which, although bold, impassioned, and forcible, was pronounced to be somewhat too redundant, simply because of the idea not then having been fully exploded, that life and spirit were not advantageous marks of style and intelligence. The good opinion Signor Cartagenova elicited in *La Straniera* he attempted to improve by playing the painful part of Filippo Visconti in Bellini's dreary *Beatrice di Tenda*, the story and presentation of which helped most effectually to destroy what little merit might be assigned to the music. Forgetting, however, that there is often more expression in repose than in unceasing restlessness of gesticulation, Signor Cartagenova, in the two nights during which the *Beatrice di Tenda* was given, managed to undo nearly all that he had previously done, and then retired, to be heard no more. Whether he ever rose to eminence may be well left in doubt. At all events, if he did so, London was not again to be the scene of a trial, which combined tests of the severest character against so established and well-deserved a favourite as Tamburini had become. Another soprano, Mdlle. Assandri, put

forward her pretensions to be placed in the foremost ranks by appearing as Zerlina in *Il Don Giovanni*, but the success she won was scarcely that of "esteem;" and she too, like so many others, quickly retired from a position for which what few powers she had by no means qualified her into the second rank, in which her services, always respectable, were of considerable advantage during the two succeeding seasons of 1837-8. Upon this lady's return to Italy, she played at Genoa, whence she proceeded to Barcelona, where she gained such unexpected celebrity, that an engagement was offered her at Berlin. Having established so great a position there as to be accepted as a favourite interpreter of the leading *rôles* in the *Lucia, Otello, Norma, Lucrezia Borgia*, &c., she went to Warsaw, and thence to St. Petersburg, returning to Italy in 1845,* after which year little or nothing has been heard of her.

The concert season of 1836 was little better than that of the opera, the Philharmonic Society having confined itself chiefly to its older *répertoire*, and brought forward no new compositions of any note or character. During the usual eight concerts, however, several eminent *artistes* were engaged, inclusive, as pianists, of Mrs. Anderson, who was this year playing with increased power and vigour; Moscheles,† then in his prime; Madame Dulcken, and Thalberg; and, as violinists, of De Beriot‡ and Ole Bull. Although Madame Dulcken had been before the English public for several years, having fixed her residence in London in 1828, I had missed frequent opportunities of hearing her; and it was only at the third concert of the

* See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. i. p. 158.

† See vol. i. p. 75.

‡ See vol. i. p. 273.

Philharmonic Society this year that I had the pleasure of making a personal acquaintance with her peculiar style and method. A German by birth—she was born at Hamburg, March 20th, 1811—and taught exclusively according to the school of that country, Madame Dulcken may be said to have been the most prominent female interpreter of Mozart, Beethoven, and Weber, that had hitherto come from abroad. Her reading of the pianoforte works of these masters was somewhat different from the already accepted method, which Mrs. Anderson had been the first and foremost to introduce. So far as classicality was concerned, the foreigner was by very many degrees the inferior. Her dash and vigour were immense, but she failed to impart those niceties of expression to the slower movements of the concertos and sonatas she selected for her public performances; and, unlike her gifted English competitor, slurred those phrases which require the utmost delicacy of manipulation to induce even the most accomplished hearer to understand their meaning and intention. There was perhaps scarcely a difficulty that Madame Dulcken could not overcome; but the true test of proficiency was absent—that "cantabile" playing which has been, and still is, the rock ahead upon which so many *artistes* make shipwreck. Like most other *artistes* resident in London, Madame Dulcken had chiefly to derive the means of maintenance for herself and her family from teaching; and the incessant occupation this wearisome toil engendered gave her but little time for prosecuting the more important duties of her profession. On this account the greater part of her public duties was based upon a system of routine that afforded little opportunity for the study of novelties, or the introduction of thoroughly legitimate performances. What she did was

conscientiously done; but the impression was always prominent, that much more might have been accomplished, had more time been spared from the drudgery of instructing others to personal improvement. Madame Dulcken was also unhappy in her domestic life, and died at the early age of thirty-nine, as much esteemed and respected in private life as she had been admired during the whole period of her public career.

It was at the sixth concert of the Philharmonic Society that I first had the opportunity of hearing Sigismond Thalberg, one of the most brilliant pianists the world has ever produced, and yet, I must say, one with whom the well-instructed musician could never be thoroughly satisfied. The cause for this opinion may be easily discerned from a most important criticism that was written of this performance, wherein, in a few words, the character, peculiarity, and nature of this remarkable man's manipulation was most distinctly and comprehensively stated. At this concert the writer says—"M. Thalberg's performance upon the pianoforte was as original and peculiar as Paganini's upon the violin, and of as surpassing excellence. One remarkable merit of his playing was its total freedom from that trickery into which one less intellectually gifted would certainly be tempted, by the possession of such extraordinary mechanical powers. One was constantly reminded of the noblest organ playing, by the huge handful of cords which he threw out in the most rapid succession, and with such solid precision as to suggest the idea of four hands being upon the keys at once. His tone, too, whilst it was remarkably delicate and singing, was as remarkably full and distinct; his shake (was) round and glittering; and his passages so full of expression, even when most rapid and complicated, as to have given another death-blow to that 'gew-

gaw' style of playing which would turn the pianoforte into a musical snuff-box a hundred times magnified. The music of M. Thalberg selected for his *début* was a grand fantasia of his own, which he performed without orchestral accompaniment. It was striking as a composition, full of unforeseen changes scientifically contrived, and original ideas happily imagined."*

A more truthfully expressive description than this could not possibly have been written. And yet one looks in vain for the discovery of any really permanent satisfaction from a single expression. The fact was, that Thalberg astonished the ears of the million rather than gratified the taste of the refined. Like Herz, he adhered wholly to his own compositions, not a bar of which was above mediocrity, his sole object having been to show off his wonderful powers of mechanism. For this end and purpose he covered sheet after sheet of music-paper with such an overwhelmingly increasing multitude of notes as could only be rightly expressed by the saying, "Rubbish shot here!" The torment he was to learners, both professional and amateur, no tongue can tell. Because the taste of the time accorded with the old notions of *Omne ignotum pro mirifico*, those students who had to sit down to the drudgery of pianoforte-practice felt it to be incumbent to imitate, as well as they might, what they could neither equal nor excel. Great, indeed, was the breakage of strings, and immense the destruction of the instruments of those days; but when Thalberg's proficiency had been approached as nearly as it was possible to reach, the returning inquiry could not fail incessantly to be, *Cui bono?* Not a single performance of his own, or of any of his pupils and hosts of imitators, ever advanced the true progress of musical art and

* See *Athenæum* for 1836, pp. 248-9.

science one step. Nay, both art and science were degraded; inasmuch as glitter and display overturned, for a time, true brilliancy and solidity, and left but a dreary void when the mania for such eccentricity had waned. German although Thalberg was by parentage and education, he was no more to be compared as a musician to those "giants," whose fame no detraction can ever injure, than the purest gold is to be contrasted with tin. Thalberg played nothing else but Thalberg. Apparently he had no soul for anything else than the "sound and fury signifying nothing" which his own hands could produce.

This extraordinary man, however, made so great a sensation, so long as he was before the public, that a slight sketch of his career may not be uninteresting. The illegitimate son of an Austrian prince—he was born at Geneva, January 7th, 1812—he had larger opportunities for receiving instruction than are vouchsafed to many a promising lad of purer birth. At a very early age he was taken to Vienna; and giving some evidences of musical proclivities, was placed under Sechter and Hummel for pianoforte instruction. That he must have devoted the earlier years of his boyhood to most assiduous practice cannot be doubted, since even at so early an age as that of fifteen years he had attracted considerable attention by the brilliancy of his playing at several concerts in Vienna. Having commenced the publication of his earliest compositions in the following year, and pursued his studies with incessant perseverance, he undertook a tour in Germany in the year 1829; and from that time was incessantly occupied in travelling throughout the Continent, increasing his reputation wherever he went, and setting the musical celebrities of the day altogether by the ears, because of

their unwillingness to admit that there was any more than the marvellous either in his playing or his writings. From 1829 to 1839 his career was one series of triumphs wherever he went. As he grew older, the whim, which his friends encouraged, seized him to try his hand at writing an opera; the result of which was the creation of a work entitled *Florinda,* the libretto by M. Scribe, afterwards translated into Italian, and produced at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1851, with the strong cast of Sophie Cruvelli, Calzolari, Sims Reeves, Coleti, and Lablache in the principal characters. It is sufficient to say of this opera here—as I shall have to mention it when my "Recollections" of 1851 come to be recorded—that it was a dead failure, even upon the confession of Mr. Lumley himself, the *entrepreneur* of Her Majesty's Theatre, who spared no expense in having it placed upon the stage.* Thalberg, disheartened at this failure, almost immediately retired into a comparatively secluded life; but in 1855 he emerged therefrom, and after visiting Brazil, made a tour in the United States, where he stayed till 1858. He then fixed his residence in the vicinity of Naples, and chiefly devoted his time and attention to wine-growing; but in 1862 he reappeared in Paris and London, and at the latter place played at a monster concert at the Crystal Palace, where I once more had an opportunity of hearing him. His fire was, however, all but gone, and the defects of his style, from his inability to overcome the marvellous difficulties which in his earlier career seemed but as child's-play to him, were so palpably apparent, that the performance was divested of all gratification. He was also but coldly received, and that seemed to tell upon a somewhat sensitive disposition with manifest disadvantage. In 1865 he

* See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 316.

again made another voyage to Brazil, and on his return settled permanently as a wine-grower upon his Italian estate, where he died somewhat suddenly last year.*

At the eighth Philharmonic Concert of the season of 1836, that remarkable violinist, Ole Bornemann Bull, already named,† made his appearance, an engagement having been readily offered him on account of the success he had attained at a well-attended concert previously given, May the 21st, at His Majesty's Theatre. Concerning that event, it was truly remarked that "as a violinist his place was very high, his tone clear and brilliant, his execution prodigious, and, for the most part, thoroughly finished. Many of his passages were written in two or three parts—one in particular, with a melody supported by a *tremolando*—and their extraordinary difficulty surmounted with the utmost ease and skill."‡ Of his taste a less favourable opinion was expressed, the advice being tendered to him that "it would be well if he ceased being an imitator, until which improvement had been made, it was not likely that he would command the highest position." This *artiste*, whom M. Fétis has designated as "*le plus excentrique des violonistes virtuoses*," was born Feb. 5, 1810, at Bergen, seventy leagues' distance from Christiania, in the eastern part of Norway. He derived his first instruction in the rudiments of his art at the royal school of music in Christiania, and, contrary to the wishes of his father, who designed him for the Church, left the university of that town and set out for Cassel in 1829, with the intention of studying under Spohr. Nothing in common being found between master and pupil, they quickly separated; and the

* See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. viii. pp. 207-209.

† See above, p. 3.

‡ See *Athenæum* for 1836, p. 386.

world might have heard little or nothing of the latter had he not fallen in with Paganini,* who was then making a tour in Germany. Attaching himself to this extraordinary man, he followed him to Paris in 1831. Failing to obtain the means of livelihood there, and having been plundered of everything he possessed in the world, even of his violin, he attempted to drown himself in the Seine; but being rescued and restored to animation, he excited the interest of a rich lady, who fancying she traced a likeness in him to a son whom she had lost, gave him the friendly shelter of her own home, and placed him under a physician, by whose care he was speedily restored to health. The most inestimable gift, however, which this newly-found patroness conferred upon him was a Guarnérius' violin, with which, furnished from the same source with sufficient means, he started for Italy, in the expectation that a successful career was immediately before him. Having suddenly to depart from Milan because of his political opinions, he betook himself to Bologna, where, at a concert, he played two compositions of his own without orchestral accompaniment, and was vehemently applauded. From Bologna he went to Rome. Here, however, he did not have the opportunity of playing in public. The same fate seemed to await him also at Naples. He had arrived there in the autumn of 1834, but was not heard till the following February, when he played between the acts of Ricci's *Nouveau Figaro*, at the Fondo Theatre, a fantasia of his own composition with orchestral accompaniments. His reputation being at last made, he visited Palermo and Messina; and, having remained a short time at Naples on his return, next went to Florence, Genoa, and Turin, and thence to Paris and London. Having,

* See vol. i. p. 195.

after this, traversed nearly the whole of Europe, he went in 1844 to America, remaining there for nearly two years, and playing in all the towns of note and celebrity. Instead of going back to Paris, he made an excursion to Algiers in 1846, then visited the south of France, and seemed as if inclined to settle in Paris in 1847. After the French revolution of 1848, the wandering mania appeared to have again fallen upon him; for he went to Brussels, and then to Norway, with the intention of setting up a national theatre at Bergen—a scheme which fell through because of his having neglected certain formalities, for which he was mulcted in penalties somewhat ungenerously, considering it was his birthplace,. This so disgusted him that he fled to Germany, and soon afterwards again crossed the Atlantic to the southern States of America. After a time, the whim seized him of founding a Scandinavian colony in Pennsylvania; but this doubtless has fallen through, since the last time he was heard of he had come back to Europe.* Although little else than an imitator of Paganini, Ole Bull was a charming violinist. His execution was brilliant and his tone pure; but, unfortunately, he was insufferably vain, and unable to bear contradiction; and, being incessantly so capricious as to imagine annoyances when and where nothing of the kind was intended, he made but few friends and a vast number of enemies. As a composer, like his prototype Paganini, he was in no respect remarkable. The only object he seemed to have in view was to provide the means for setting forth his own powers. For this he sacrificed rhythm, taste, and all other qualities that go to the creation of real music.

* See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. ii. pp. 107-8. Since the above was in type, Ole Bull has returned to the United States.

In this year I heard, at the first Philharmonic Concert of the season, the best English female contralto that had appeared for many years, Mrs. Alfred Shaw, who, when known as Miss Postans, had been a pupil of Sir Geo. Smart,* and under his tuition had become the most competent interpreter of Handel's music of her time. She was likewise equally efficient in the music of other masters, and in the instance referred to, sang Cherubini's well-known and exquisitely written "O salutaris Hostia" with a depth of feeling and a breadth of phrasing, that as much astonished as delighted the most cold and critical of all the London audiences. This lady's career was unfortunately cut short much too early by her having been attacked with deafness, which no treatment could relieve,; but she settled in Norfolk, as a teacher of singing.

Although my "Recollections" of this year have thus far embraced little else than a few passing remarks upon the London operatic and concert season, and may thus seem to have been comparatively uneventful, one circumstance alone will always make the year itself of more than ordinary importance in my musical career—the production at the Grand Opéra or Académie Royale de Musique, Paris, of Meyerbeer's most successfully popular opera *Les Huguenots.* I had arranged to visit Paris for the first performance of this great work; but uncontrollable circumstances prevented the fulfilment of my intentions till several weeks after February 29th, 1836, when the event came off. From this cause I did not hear a performance in its immediately original condition, several "cuts" having even then been made to shorten the time of its interpretation, which lasted from seven P.M. till after midnight. There had been, however, no

* See vol. i. pp. 80—90.

change in the cast, which embraced the talent of Mdme. Dorus-Gras* (Marguerite de Valois), M. Serda (St. Bris, the Roman-Catholic Governor of the Louvre), Mdlle. Falcon† (Valentina), M. Derevis (Count de Nevers), M. Nourrit‡ (Raoul de Nangis), M. Levasseur§ (Marcel), and Mdlle. Flechieux (the Page); whilst the subordinate parts were filled by MM. Dupont, Wartel, Massol, Prevost, &c. The impression this glorious work made upon my own mind is so distinctly recorded in the following remarks, expressed in so much better terms than I myself could ever hope to use, that I have no scruple whatever in adopting them :

"I have found myself—every note of the music ringing in my ears as if I was listening to Falcon, Nourrit, and Levasseur —writing as of some real event which I have seen and heard, and not a mere dramatic presentment in a form which some still satirize as too absurdly conventional to be capable of producing the slightest deep emotion. It is too late after such a dream to come back with the lantern light of small speculation to measure details and examine peculiarities of structure. How far more gladly than describe such music would I make memory play it in the ears of my friend the reader !"‖

Of the production of *Les Huguenots* in 1836 M. Fétis says :

"At first neither the public nor the greater number of the critics comprehended the merit Meyerbeer had displayed. Although they asserted that the duet between Valentina and Marcel in the third act, the duel scene, the whole of the fourth act, and a part of the fifth, manifested beauties of the highest order, and although they (farther) declared that nothing so pa-

* See vol. i. p. 221.
† See vol. i. p. 221.
‡ See vol. i. p. 221.
§ See vol. i. p. 221.
‖ *Music and Manners in France and Germany*, by Henry F. Chorley, pp. 204-5. Ed. London, 1841.

thetic as the last scene of the fourth act was ever known, yet it was thought that the score of *Les Huguenots* was inferior to that of *Robert le Diable*. Not long afterwards those who were disinterested abjured their error; amongst these the value of the work has year by year increased, and the most obstinate have been convinced of a success established by many representations during five-and-twenty years in every part of the world. . . . After the two first years of this great success, a party, influenced by contrary interests, manifested both bitterness and injustice in their criticism, with more obstinacy than on account of the novelty of the work. . . . What has been the result? The score of *Les Huguenots*, in spite of some defects, and the beauties that are inherent in the talent of the master, still maintains all its renown."*

As I shall have to speak more at large of this work under the period of its introduction at the Royal Italian Opera in 1848, I must content myself with the above remarks for the present.

Amongst the number of detractors to whom M. Fétis might have alluded, no one was more positive than the musical critic of the *Athenæum*, who in that journal of the 4th of June, 1836, whilst referring to a concert given by Mrs. Bishop, on the 27th of May, at the King's Theatre, remarked, "We arrived in time to hear the selection of *somewhat incomprehensible music* from *Les Huguenots*. It is not fair to judge of an opera by a few detached *morceaux*, and these probably not its best, nor particularly well-performed, or we should say that *the fame of this long-talked-of work* will not extend to any great *distance beyond the walls of the Académie Royale*." Did I not now know that Mr. Henry F. Chorley occupied the post of musical critic of the

* See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. vi. p. 424.

Athenæum at the time above specified, I could scarcely have believed that it was possible for him to have been the writer both of this unqualified prediction, and of the observations I have above quoted as coinciding with my own.* But so great a want of discernment has been amply illustrated: for without exception, no opera extant has ever brought more money to the opera-houses of the Continent—or of our own country—than *Les Huguenots,* or exceeded it in universal admiration. It was alone the means, as I have said already, for the establishment of the Royal Italian Opera at Covent Garden in 1848, when the Queen commanded it to be prepared for her first state visit to that house, and when the ridiculous assertion by almost every one concerned in the performance, except Mdme. Viardot, that it was "Chinese music," was immediately and for ever exploded.

No opening having been offered to Madame Malibran—or, as she was now announced, as Madame de Beriot†—at His Majesty's Theatre, that accomplished woman entered into an engagement with Mr. Bunn at Drury Lane Theatre in the month of May, and three nights a week filled that house from floor to ceiling "by her own individual powers of magnetism, and making even the enormous sums she received a capital investment for the lessee."‡ At first her personations were confined to Beethoven's *Fidelio* and Bellini's *Sonnambula,* in the latter, if I rightly remember, only once. But on Friday, May the 27th, she made such "a hit" as perhaps has scarcely ever been exceeded in any theatre of the world, by her creation of the part

* Mr. Chorley, in an elaborate essay, subsequently took quite the opposite view of the work.

† See vol. i. p. 275.

‡ See *Athenæum* for 1836, p. 364.

of Isoline* in Balfe's opera, the *Maid of Artois*, the music of which had been expressly written for this "wonderful creature," as even the staid and somewhat rigid critic of the *Athenæum* could not refrain from designating her. In connection with this remarkable event, which I witnessed, it may not be out of place first of all to give some account of the opera itself. The opinion that it was inferior in its entirety to the *Siege of Rochelle*† as a work of art generally prevailed at the time of its presentation; and but for Madame Malibran having "created" and sustained the leading character, it would, in all probability, have been but coldly received. The best proof that such an opinion was well grounded is to be found in the fact that, since the lamented death of Madame Malibran, the *Maid of Artois* has not been permanently successful; nor until a *prima donna*, possessed of the same powers of intelligence and vocal excellence which shone so triumphantly bright in herself, appears—and when may such an event be hoped for?—is it ever likely to be put before the public again. In speaking of the characteristics of this opera on its first production, I prefer to revive the observations of the *Times* of May 28, 1836, than to rely upon any remarks of my own, especially as I have the gratification of being able wholly to agree with them:—

"A new opera, called the *Maid of Artois*, the music of which is composed by Mr. Balfe, and in which Madame Malibran sustained the principal part, was played here (Drury Lane) for the first time last night. The attraction of a new opera at this period of the season; the fact of its being the work of an Irish

* Madame Anna Bishop, Mrs. Wood (Miss Paton), and the late Miss Romer (Mrs. G. Almond), all essayed the part of "Isoline."

† See vol. i. p. 321.

composer, who by his previous efforts has deserved well of the public; and, more perhaps than these, the well-deserved popularity of Madame Malibran, were likely to produce a good house; but even this combination had not prepared us to expect such an audience as was assembled last night. The house was not only full before the opera commenced, but was filled by a company whose appearance gave an *éclat* to the theatre which it does not always display. . . . The overture, which is spirited and gay, was encored. The opera—the story of which is, we believe, original, although the personages are French—opens with a scene in one of the public places in Paris, the period of the action being at the latter part of the reign of Louis XV. Groups of citizens and soldiers are seen parading and amusing themselves. After a lively chorus and a spirited song by a recruiting sergeant, Sans Regret (Mr. Giubelei),* and a very delightful *scena* by Mr. Phillips,† who plays the Marquis de Château-Vieux, the colonel of the regiment, the stage being cleared, Jules de Montagnon (Mr. Templeton),‡ a young countryman of the province of Artois, enters in a state of dejection. He has come from his native village in search of Isoline (Madame Malibran), his betrothed wife, who has been lured to Paris by the Marquis de Château-Vieux, and whom Jules believes to have deserted him for his more wealthy and powerful rival. In his despair the sergeant presents himself, learns that he is in grief and penniless, and under the pretence of serving him, enlists him as a recruit into his own regiment. Isoline's friend and follower, Coralie (Miss Healey), has an appointment with the sergeant; Jules recognises her, and learns that his mistress is in Paris, and at the same moment makes the unpleasant dis-

* See vol. i. p. 285. † See vol. i. p. 187. ‡ See vol. i. p. 320.

covery that his pretended friend, Sans Regret, has enlisted him. He is surrounded by a detachment of the troops; remonstrance is useless, resistance in vain, and he is marched off to the barracks; and the scene closes with a chorus of that striking character which is likely to make it popular. Coralie bears the intelligence of this disaster to Isoline, who, although exposed to the temptations of the Marquis's wealth, and the influence of his persuasion, had resisted all, and remains true to her lover. The *scena* by Isoline when she is first discovered is a very beautiful composition, and was sung by Madame Malibran with that graceful and touching expression of which she is so perfect a mistress. The applause which followed it was of that rapturous character which she alone upon the English stage has the power of exciting. From this moment the success of the opera seemed certain. The audience were so completely fascinated, that the sequel must have been bad indeed, if it could have marred the effect which this performance had produced. The Marquis then enters; Isoline implores him to save her lover, and to restore him to her. The first request the Marquis is willing to grant, but upon a condition which makes the second impossible; namely, that Isoline will become his. After a long and passionate struggle, which was admirably acted, and the music accompanying it as admirably sung, she consents to sacrifice herself, if by that means alone she can restore Jules to liberty. Immediately after the departure of the Marquis, Jules enters the apartment by the balcony. He has discovered the place of Isoline's retreat, has deserted from his regiment, and arrives worn out by fatigue and drenched by the storm. A very moving scene ensues. Jules believes her to have been guilty of infidelity; but at length, convinced by her simple but solemn assertion of her

innocence, he proposes to her to fly with him from the hotel of the Marquis, which she readily consents to do. The raging of the storm delays their departure, and while they are singing a duet the Marquis enters. An altercation ensues between Jules and the Marquis; the latter draws upon his rival, who, in his own defence, wounds him. The Marquis's followers and soldiers rush in; the lovers are separated, and Jules hurried away to his doom. The *finale* of this act, by Madame Malibran, is one of the most powerful and effective of her displays. At the end of the first act she was unanimously called for by the audience, and obeyed the call. The second act opens at a fort on the sea coast in French Guiana, where Jules, in the dress of a slave, is enduring the sentence of transportation to which his offence against his superior officer had exposed him. Mr. Seguin,* who plays the inspector of the fort (Synnelet), has a clever bass song, which he gave with great skill and spirit. A ballet is introduced here which, but that perhaps some expedient is necessary to afford Mdme. Malibran a short repose after the exertions which the first act requires, might well be dispensed with. A ship from France is seen in the offing, and a boat's crew land with dispatches. One of this crew, a seeming sailor-boy, is Isoline, who, in this disguise, has fled from France to aid in her lover's rescue, and to share his fate. She changes her male attire for the garb of a sister of charity, has an interview with Jules, which she procures by bribing the gaoler, but their raptures are interrupted by the arrival of the inspector, who, having learned Isoline's story, and being captivated by her charms, offers his addresses to her. She repulses him, and he is about to proceed to violence, when Jules rushes forward, and,

* See vol. i. p. 185.

having seized a gun, brings the inspector to reason, and locks him in one of his own dungeons, while, with the assistance of a negro slave, the lovers make their escape to the desert. The duet between Mdme. Malibran and Mr. Templeton in this scene is one of the most charming pieces in the opera. Just as the escape takes place, the governor of the colony arrives. This is no other than the Marquis of Château-Vieux, who has accepted a foreign employment for the purpose of dissipating the grief which the loss of Isoline, and the remorse for having destroyed her happiness, had occasioned. A ballad, 'The light of other days is faded,' which is introduced here, is a very elegant composition. Mr. Phillips's singing it is likely to add to his well-established reputation. . . . This is one of the *morceaux*, and there are several others in the opera which can hardly fail to become very popular. The third act discovers the lovers in the desert. A red interminable waste of sand surrounds them. Jules has sunk exhausted on the ground, and Isoline is supporting his head upon her knee. He is bleeding from a stab he has received, and the hot sand of the desert has worked itself into his festering wound. She empties the water gourd which was about his neck upon the wound, and binds it with her handkerchief. He revives, and they promise to continue their flight, when Isoline's strength fails. She is dying from fatigue and thirst; the gourd is exhausted; she sinks upon the ground dying. No human help is near, and hope seems extinct; the wretched lover throws himself upon the apparently lifeless body of his mistress in utter despair. At this moment, a distant sound of martial music is heard; a procession accompanying the governor to the capital is seen crossing the desert. The sound rouses Jules. The escort approaches; some of the attendants bring refreshments,

and Isoline is revived, but only to see her lover once more in the hands of the inspector, when the negro slave invokes the protection of the governor. The Marquis recognises Isoline and Jules, who expect that a still more dreadful fate than they had just escaped awaits them; but the Marquis, touched by their sufferings, joins their hands, and their sorrows are at an end. The *finale,* which Madame Malibran sings, must be heard ; to describe it adequately is impossible. It is one of the most delicious thrilling pieces that has perhaps ever been heard on the stage, and is executed with surpassing skill. The opera is in all respects well got up, and well acted. With very delightful music, to which Madame Malibran, Mr. Phillips, Mr. Templeton, and Mr. Seguin do full justice; with some remarkably good scenery, well-written dialogue, and verses good enough for the purpose, it is upon the whole the most successful and the most deserving production of the season. The applause with which it was received throughout, coming from such an audience as that of last night, leaves it unquestionable that the opera will become as popular as it deserves to be. The contentment of the spectators seemed to know no bounds. They insisted upon Madame Malibran, Mr. Templeton, and Mr. Phillips appearing after the curtain had fallen, and called also for Mr. Balfe to receive the praises to which he is well entitled for his share in the production which has excited such general delight."

It was admitted on all hands that this effort of Madame Malibran was the greatest she had ever made, and the impression which her singing and acting have left on the memory of those who heard and saw her can never be obliterated. Her success was the more remarkable because, never physically a

robust woman, and her spirit being far beyond her strength, she at this time was in anything but good health. The wear and tear of the rehearsals of the *Maid of Artois* had also greatly wearied her; for, being determined that it should succeed, she threw her whole heart and soul into that wearying work, and really "stage-managed" every scene, and would not let anything pass until she was thoroughly assured that all danger of failure, or even of a cold reception, had vanished. At the end of the first act, those who were most intimately acquainted with her perceived that she was becoming exhausted, and were horrified at finding the audience—as most audiences generally are—disposed to be more than usually exacting in demanding encores after the greatest efforts to please them, without any common sense—if it ever could be exercised—being allowed the slightest opportunity of exerting itself. So intense was Malibran's "pluck"—which is the only word that can describe her energy aright—that she would not give way, but went through the second act with a determination that said, "Beaten I will not be!" She, however, remembered that an immense trial awaited her in the *finale* of the third act; and finding her strength giving way, she sent for Mr. Balfe and Mr. Bunn, and told them that unless they did as they were bid, after all the previous success, the end might result in failure; but she said, "Manage to let me have a pot of porter somehow or other before I have to sing, and I will get you an encore which will bring down the house." How to manage this was difficult; for the scene was so set that it seemed scarcely possible to hand her up "the pewter" without its being witnessed by the audience, and thus "the one step from the sublime to the ridiculous" being realised. After

much consultation, Malibran having been assured that her wish should be fulfilled, it was arranged that the pot of porter should be handed up to her through a trap in the stage at the moment when Jules had thrown himself upon her body, supposing that life had fled; and Mr. Templeton was drilled into the manner in which he should so manage to conceal the necessary arrangement, that the audience would never suspect what was going on. At the right moment a friendly hand put the foaming pewter through the stage, to be swallowed at a draught, and success was won! Well might the writer above quoted have said that the *finale* must have been heard. No power of language any man could use can ever describe how it was delivered. Malibran, however, had not over-estimated her own strength. She knew it wanted but this fillip to carry her through. She had resolved to have an encore, and she had it, in such a fashion as made the roof of "Old Drury" ring as it had never rung before. On the repetition of the opera and afterwards, a different arrangement of the stage was made, and a property calabash containing a pot of porter was used; but although the same result was constantly won, Malibran always said it was not half so "nice," nor did her anything like the good it would have done if she could only have had it out of the pewter.

The *Maid of Artois* was the last opera in which this "wonderful creature" was ever to delight the English musical public. On the 10th of September she went down with her husband, De Beriot, to take part in the Manchester Musical Festival; but it was remarked by all her friends that she was by no means in her usual spirits, and that her efforts were made rather under compulsion than by that impulse which was

so constantly apparent in everything she undertook. On the morning of the 14th (Wednesday), she took part in a miscellaneous sacred performance, and sang with Clara Novello,* in the third part, Marcello's duet "Qual Anelante," with so much lively gaiety, fulness of execution, and a singleness of purpose, and so delighted the audience, that, at the request of several distinguished individuals, it was, not immediately, but after one or two portions of Handel's *Israel in Egypt* had been given, repeated; and so great was the excitement which this repetition induced, that, at its conclusion, a few persons were so excited, that they could not resist the impulse, testifying their delight by clapping their hands. Of the *Israel* Malibran gave the succeeding solo, "Sing ye to the Lord," with such pathos and finished declamation, as "to leave nothing to be wished for but the longer continuation of the strain." The concert of the same evening was a most brilliant affair. The theatre—where it was given—was crammed in the several departments of boxes, pit, and gallery, to suffocation. Hundreds of individuals would have been glad to have obtained standing-room; but every situation from which a view could be obtained, or a sound heard, was filled up. The manner of Malibran's having taken her part in the "Canon" from *Fidelio* with Clara Novello, and Messrs. Bennett and Phillips, was thus written of at the time: "Nothing could surpass the graceful execution of Malibran in this piece, unless we accept her astonishing felicity of expression and facility of execution in the succeeding duetto from the *Andronico* of Mercadante, in which Madame Caradori-Allan† shone out with surprising brilliancy, whilst in the concluding portion the notes of Malibran were showered forth

* See vol. i. p. 276.

† See vol. i. p. 116.

in gorgeous profusion. A complete storm of applause testified the enthusiasm of the audience, and the rapturous encore which succeeded was instantly responded to."* Alas! Malibran's "gorgeous profusion of notes" was the last strain of "the dying swan." From some impulse or other—for which, she told me, she never could and never would be able to account—Madame Caradori-Allan was seized with a desire to discover whether she could equal her competitor in the final *cadenza* of Mercadante's duet upon its repetition. Accomplished musician as she was, she was at no loss for invention, and outdid herself. Malibran, whilst she was singing, looked at her with astonishment; but there "was a lurking devil in her eye," which said, "I will beat that." And so she did; for such a *cadenza* as she immediately improvised was never heard to pass from the throat and lips of any other *artiste* that ever lived. Then came the "final close," which completed, and the acknowledgments made to the audience, Malibran staggered off the stage, and, the moment she was out of sight, fell senseless into the arms of a bystander, who saved her from falling head foremost. She was immediately removed to her lodgings, at the Mosley Arms Hotel, and Drs. Bardsley, Hall, and Worthington were sent for in all haste; but at the time she was to have reappeared to take her part in the second act in the quintet from Mozart's "Cosi fan tutte," an apology was made for her, on the ground that the indisposition under which she had for some time past, and especially on the previous morning, been suffering, but from which it was hoped she was fast recovering, had returned with such violence, that copious bleeding from the arm had been deemed advisable, and the utmost quietness or-

* The *Times* of September 16, 1836.

dered. Although, however, under such circumstances, it was impossible that she could appear again that evening, a hope was expressed that she would on the morrow be sufficiently convalescent to take part in the business allotted to her in the "scheme." As a compensation for her untoward absence, M. de Beriot, it was announced, would perform a solo on the violin in lieu of the song which had been set down for her, whilst Madame Caradori-Allan immediately took her place in the quintet. Under the care of the medical men who had been summoned to her, poor Malibran seemed for a short time likely to rally; but the copious bleeding had done its worst under the condition in which she was found to be, which these medical men seemed to be unaware of. De Beriot, being dissatisfied with their treatment, sent to London for his own physician, a homœopathist—Dr. Bellomini—which so offended the regular practitioners, that they immediately refused to meet him, and retired from the case. Her complaint was inflammation arising from premature confinement. Up to the time of Dr. Bellomini's arrival she had gradually continued to decline; she, however, rallied under his treatment until September 22nd; but in the course of that day a relapse took place, which so greatly alarmed him, that he was induced to call in the aid of Mr. Lewis, a surgeon. On the following morning she had become much worse, and lay in a state of the greatest exhaustion, apparently unconscious of everything around her, and but little hopes were entertained of her recovery. Every effort that skill could devise to restore her was resorted to; but the melancholy event took place precisely at twenty minutes to twelve o'clock, up to which period she had continued to sink without regaining her faculties for a moment.

Many explanations were offered to account for so sudden a collapse of Madame Malibran's health and strength, but scarcely one touched the actual cause, as I heard it from her mother's (Mdme. Garcia) lips, whilst on a visit to M. and Mdme. Viardot, at their country seat, Courtavenil, near Rozy en Brie, in the autumn of 1853. This account I will now give as briefly as possible.

Malibran was a fearless horsewoman, and availed herself of every opportunity she could obtain of enjoying the exhilarating exercise a gallop induces. Her husband was in this respect a timid man, and greatly disliking such a propensity, sought earnestly to dissuade her from following it. But a very short time before the Manchester Festival, she had ridden a restive and ill-tempered horse, which had very nearly flung her. She was obstinately determined to conquer the viciousness of the beast; but De Beriot implored her not to make the attempt. Finding that entreaty was of no avail, he resorted to command, which Malibran promised to obey, because, inferior as he was to her, his influence, when thus exerted, seemed to throw a spell over her. A few days afterwards, some friends called upon her and proposed a morning's ride in the Row, to which she consented. She sent for a horse, and, to her surprise no less than her annoyance, the very beast she had pledged her word never to mount again arrived for her use. There was no time to send for another. She did not wish to disappoint her friends, who had made the party expressly for her. She hesitated but for a moment, and then mounted the horse, who almost immediately began to manifest his usual viciousness. Influenced by the knowledge that what she was doing would greatly irritate her husband, were he made aware of it, and annoyed at finding she

would have to exercise all her skill to manage the animal, she adopted the unwise course of driving instead of striving to humour him. When she and her friends had reached the Row, the horse bolted, having taken the bit, as she imagined, between his teeth. She became alarmed, lost her presence of mind, and was finally flung; but her habit before she fell having caught the pommel of the saddle, her head was bumped several times upon the road, whence she was, as soon as the horse was stopped, picked up nearly insensible. She was put into a cab, and taken home; but fearing to let De Beriot know of what had happened, she neither sent for medical advice, nor gave herself the slightest relaxation from the duties of her profession. She was *enceinte* at this very time, but had concealed this fact from her husband, so that when the Manchester physicians were called in, she being insensible, they were in entire ignorance of her real condition, and imputed her sudden seizure to determination of blood to the head, brought on by too much excitement and exertion. Her premature confinement disclosed the mischief when it was too late. The depletion she had been subjected to added to the improbability of her recovery, and left her no power to rally, in spite of her excellent constitution and previous good health. At the Norwich Festival, when the sad news arrived, a gloom at once settled upon all the *artistes*, most of whom had been with her in Manchester. The interment of her remains took place a few days after her death in the south aisle, adjoining the chapel recently used as a vestry, in the collegiate church of Manchester; but they were permitted to remain there but a short time, her husband having obtained a faculty for their removal to Laëken, near Brussels, where he had a château, and erected a somewhat whimsical

monument to her memory, a copy of which may be seen in the centre aisle of the Crystal Palace. Much censure was passed upon M. de Beriot for having, immediately after Malibran's decease, suddenly quitted Manchester, leaving her funeral obsequies to be performed by strangers. Excuses were offered for conduct which to English minds appears most singular, to say the least of it, and which was also not altogether satisfactory to Madame Malibran's relatives. But at all events there can be no doubt respecting the intensity of M. de Beriot's grief, who mourned his irreparable loss to his dying day, and never seemed to have looked up again.*

Before entirely dismissing this accomplished woman and wonderful *artiste* from consideration, I cannot withhold some most just and appropriate remarks, that were published immediately after her death :—" We are not about to offer any cold or detailed criticism upon the merits of Madame Malibran as a singer or as an actress ; but a parting word or two may be permitted us. In both characters she was distinguished above all her contemporaries by versatility of power and liveliness of conception. She could play with music of every possible style, school, and century. We have heard her on the same evening sing *in five different languages,* giving with equal truth and character the intense and passionate *scena* from *Der Freischütz,* and those sprightly and charming Provençal airs, many of which were

* Mr. C. L. Gruneisen was in the Mosley Arms Hotel with Malibran, De Beriot, Lablache, Ivanhoff, Mori, &c., and reported in the *Morning Post* the account of her death. M. de Beriot, before his wife died, made the arrangements for her funeral in the collegiate church (now the cathedral) with Mr. Beale, (the father of the late Frederick Beale (Cramer, Beale & Co.). De Beriot started for Paris, to secure his wife's property, fearing that Malibran, her first husband, from whom she had been divorced, might have a lien, according to the French law.

composed by herself. The extensive compass of her voice enabled her to command the whole range of songs which is usually divided between the contralto and soprano.* She was, it is true, often hurried away by the tameless vivacity of her spirits into flights and cadences which were more eccentric than beautiful. We have heard her, in the very wantonness of consummate power, rival the unvocal *arpeggi* of De Beriot's violin, and execute the most sudden shakes and divisions upon those highest and deepest notes of the voice which less perfectly trained singers approach warily and with preparation. But those know little of the dignity Madame Malibran could assume, or of the unexaggerated expression which she could throw into music, even the plainest and least fantastic, who were not familiar with her oratorio performances—with the earnest pathos of her *scena*, "Deh parlate" (Cimarosa's noblest song); with the calm and holy sweetness of her "Pastorale" from the *Messiah*, "He shall feed His flock;" or, in a strain loftier than these, with the delivery of that most magnificent of recitatives, "Sing ye to the Lord," from *Israel in Egypt*. In this last she so completely identified herself with the spirit of the scene, that no painter of "Miriam, the Prophetess," ever dreamed of face, form, or attitude more appropriate, more instinct with sublime triumph than hers at that moment.†

* Her voice was a contralto in character, but it extended to a range that was astonishing. She could descend to F and E flat below the lower C in the treble clef, and reach C and D in alt.

† In confirmation, to the utmost, of the above remarks, I cannot refrain from adding another instance of the pathos Malibran threw into her oratorio singing at the last morning performance of the Norwich Festival of 1833. At the request of Mr. Edward Taylor, Handel's recitative, "Ye sacred priests," and its succeeding motivos, "Farewell, ye limpid streams," and "Brighter scenes I seek above," from *Jephtha*, were set down for her in the

The *acting* of Madame Malibran was marked by the same characteristics as her singing. It was always coloured, at times *over-coloured*, by the spirit which sustained her for a while through a career of unexampled exertion and excitement. If in no entire performance she ever equalled the Sibylline grandeur of Pasta or the intense pathos of Schröder,* she had her moments of inspiration, when she electrified her listeners by outbursts so brilliantly passionate as to make all her compeers forgotten. Her performance of Norma has been described to us as beyond all praise; her Fidelio was the best character in which she appeared in England. The concentrated and piercing agony of her speaking voice in the grave-scene of that delicious opera is at our heart as we write; in the part of Fidelio, too, her action was not carried to the excess which in other dramas

"scheme." She had never seen or heard a note of the music till she was asked to venture upon it; but just before going into the orchestra, in my hearing, she said to Mr. Edward Taylor, pointing to her "part," "I am going to sing this to please you; but as I know nothing about it, you must tell me what I am to do." He answered, "I shall not do that, for you want no help from me." Upon her expressing, by a shrug of the shoulders, her vexation at this answer, he at once added, "But this I will do: here, here, and there"—pointing to one or two places—"Mara, whom I once heard sing it, made her great points." "That will do!" was her immediate answer. Not a bar had been rehearsed; but she could rely for the accompaniment upon those who were intrusted with the duty, and were accustomed to her manner. The wailing notes of the recitative and following motivo went to the heart, and touched its innermost cords of grief; but the manner in which she, as it were, imperceptibly hurried the time of the exultant sequel, "Brighter scenes I seek above," as if to lend wings for the fulfilment of the aspiration of immortality, positively elevated the souls of her hearers. So grand, so great, so glorious an effect, I really believe was never before realised. Stern, unimpulsive, and rigid man as Mr. Edward Taylor was, I saw the tears silently course down his cheeks, livid with emotion; and when the concert was ended, he said to me, "*You* heard what I said to her! Mara, great as she was, could not be compared with her in a century!"

* See vol. i. p. 280.

at times almost seemed to threaten life and reason.* In the *opera buffa*, as Zerlina, Rosina, Cenerentola, Fidalma (which last, be it remembered, she performed in London to the Caroline and Lizetta of the Sontags), her vivacity had no bounds. Her *smorfie*, too, had the charm and the fault of caprices struck out in the humour of the moment. In short, upon the stage, though she was often extravagant, she was always *riveting;* and few among her audiences could go home and sit in cool judgment upon one who, while she was before them, carried them as she pleased to the extremes of grave and gay.

"The woman was one with the musician and the actress. The personal fatigue through which Madame Malibran's high spirit bore her was prodigious. She has been known to undergo the wear and tear of a five-hours' rehearsal, with a song at some morning concert between its pauses; and then again in the evening half an hour after having gone through one of her exhausting parts, to be found as energetic and animated as ever at the Philharmonic or Ancient Concerts. And this again she would leave for some private party, where, after singing with a freshness surprisingly little impaired, she would wind up her day's exertions, perhaps, by dancing the tarantella. She was the delight of all her intimate friends for the many gifts she possessed, besides those which made her so professionally eminent.† Her observation was keen, her humour quaint and

* Except, it might have been added, in the one instance already recorded, vol. i. p. 170.

† In a previous chapter (see vol. i. p. 320), it has been mentioned that Mr. Templeton was raised to the position he held in his profession simply on account of Malibran having undertaken the somewhat difficult task of being his instructor; and an anecdote is told of the manner to which she resorted to accomplish her purpose. "This she did," not by always showing temper, but "in a manner peculiar to herself, blending good nature with a little satirical,

inexhaustible, and her fund of anecdote various and always at command. She was skilful with the pencil — some of her sketches are full of genius and character. Her love of her art was intense and consuming; and the circumstance should never be forgotten, either as honourable to her memory or as a warning to too exacting audiences, that her illness was exasperated by her dragging herself into the Manchester orchestra to fulfil her engagements rather than subject herself to the imputation of feigned indisposition, and that she exerted herself to comply with the fatal demands of a delighted audience when the hand of death was upon her. It is difficult to write calmly of these things, and the thousand recollections that crowd upon us warn us to stop, lest we pass our wonted boundaries. It is enough to say that, in the lyric drama of Europe, she who has died has left no peer behind her!" *

approaching to epigrammatic, point; and thus she succeeded in animating him comparatively with a spark of her own Promethean fire. When he was not *au fait* at stage business, she would sometimes address him after this style: "You are cold, inanimate! Are you a man? Have you a wife? Do you love that wife?" On his replying in the affirmative, she would thus resume her lecture: "Then would you, if she were in such trouble, stand so far from her, and regard her with such indifference? Approach closer to me, and seem very sorry for my situation. Come to me; I shall not bite you." It is stated, that on one occasion Mr. Templeton, encouraged by her request that he would "act up" to her, in one of the principal love-scenes during the rehearsal—and every allowance must be made for his feelings, when the irresistible excitement is considered by which he was borne away, until his reason was made a captive by passion—kissed her neck. She instantly checked him, and observed, "*Sir*, that is not necessary! You may affect to make love to me as much as you please before the public; but let me desire you never to repeat what you have thus done." Confused at her manner, vexed at his own impetuosity, Mr. Templeton apologised respectfully to her, and she passed over the slight offence with as much kindness as she had before exhibited a noble and just resentment."—From Nathan's *Memoir of Madame Malibran*, quoted in the *Times* of Oct. 10th, 1836.

* See *Athenæum* for 1836, p. 707.

The last musical event of this year worth recording is the production of Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*, at the Liverpool Musical Festival, on October 7th, under the direction of Sir George Smart. It is well known that in the opinion of the Germans this oratorio is held in higher esteem than the *Elijah*, and although that opinion is not at present indorsed in England—as I believe it eventually will be—I have no hesitation in saying that "it will live when the other is forgotten," always supposing that such an event can by any possibility occur. I had the good fortune to be present on the occasion of the production of this grand work, and I was immediately convinced at the rehearsal, which conviction was confirmed by the performance, that it was the greatest oratorio that had been composed since the days of Handel; that it was worthy of comparison with many of the efforts of that master, and certainly quite on a level with, if not beyond, anything that had been left by Haydn or Mozart. In this opinion I was at the time far from being supported; although I have lived to hear even those who were in 1836 Mendelssohn's greatest detractors, admit quite as much, if not more than I myself did not then fear to express. Thus, for example, the critic of the *Times* declared that "to those who had attended the other Festivals, and had come from Norwich and Worcester with all the majesty of *Israel in Egypt*, the grace and loveliness of the *Creation*, and both united in *Redemption*,* fresh in their recollection—to all such, *St. Paul* must stand in a situation of perilous contrast;" and, having delivered himself of this off-hand condemnation, he thus pro-

* This was an adaptation of the *Requiem* to English words, with one or two interpolations from other works of Mozart, by Mr. Edward Taylor, for the previous Norwich Festival.

ceeded to explain his meaning: "It is quite impossible to drive impressions so powerful as these, and which occur too rarely to admit of their being transient, from the mind. Spite of every endeavour, they will be present to the memory, and any subsequent one must, until a sacred writer superior to Handel, Haydn, and Mozart arise, be less vivid and deep. The general character of *St. Paul* is truly ecclesiastical; its style is purely and completely that of the Church. Seldom does the author wander into those regions of melody which lead the senses captive from the commencement to the termination of the *Creation*. The youngest of the German school, he is the least modern. It is true that every now and then we are made to feel that he has lived after Mozart and Haydn, by the riches and power of his instrumentation; but such instances appear only in the filling up of his work, the outline of which is of remoter style." Then it is asserted "that this oratorio is most likely to suffer from the indiscreet praises of misjudging and interested individuals, who seem not to be disposed to content themselves with the *quantum* of praise to which it is fairly entitled. It is a work of considerable genius and erudition; it is a work for the musician to con over with profit and pleasure; there is no violation of propriety throughout, none of good taste. Everything is constructed according to the most approved models, and combined with a strict adherence to musical canons; but there are no fervid bursts of genius, no witching graces of melody, except as they occur enriched with harmony in the chorales, which are, for a modern oratorio, frequent. The songs are throughout grave and sombre, not unfrequently dull. By far the greater proportion of these is allotted to the same, and that the bass, voice. Madame Caradori, Mrs. Wood,

and Mrs. Shaw had a song each, no more. This want of the soprano voice, though it operates against the general effect of the oratorio, yet seems the result of choice, since the absence of dramatic character left the composer free and unfettered in the selection of his singers. Braham, too, had only a single air, or rather he accompanied Lindley in a solo. *St. Paul* may almost be called an oratorio consisting of a succession of choruses, interspersed with recitations and airs for a bass voice. Phillips did his best to give animation, interest, and variety to his mighty part, and no one could have succeeded better; but the author had made it unnecessarily ponderous, and the continual recurrence of the same voice became wearisome to the ear. We conjecture that not a single air from this oratorio will be transplanted into the concert-room; the interest, the effect of the songs throughout depends on their connection with the piece. The causes to which we have alluded will prevent in future . . . any feeling . . . beyond that of approbation. *St. Paul* is not a work for unlearned ears, and even those who can follow the author through the intricacies of fugal counterpoint long for a few gleams of melody."

In a far different spirit, and, as I can but think, with a much more accurate judgment, the opinion of the critic of the *Athenæum* was more wisely and accurately given; for in that journal of the 15th of October he says, "We have long felt that as regards the future, it was to M. Mendelssohn that we were to look for works, not merely of the subtlest intellectual refinement, but also of the brightest original genius. It is needless to point to the fame he has already won by his pianoforte compositions and his descriptive overtures for the full orchestra. These must have become far more widely popular, had not the

former by their difficulty been placed above the reach of most amateurs, and the latter been conceived with a high soaring fancy, which an English audience is not as yet able to appreciate or follow. In his oratorio of *St. Paul*, M. Mendelssohn has taken a more exalted flight. While he has grasped his subject in its most picturesque and striking aspect, he has wrought out his conceptions with science, indeed, but that science refined into a grand simplicity. In few instances have the popular and conventional forms been followed by him, for the sake of exhibiting the singer's voice, or reiterating some favourite melody. He has thought more of his story than himself; and this resolution of making his music a *means*, and not an *end*, raises him high above those who, more self-engrossed and mechanical, too often sacrifice propriety of character and progress of interest to some captivating *ritornello* or abstruse harmonic combination." In complete contradiction to the *Times* critic's remark that "Braham accompanied Lindley in a solo," * the *Athenæum* speaks truly of "Be thou faithful unto death"—the solo in question—as "a delicious and consoling air, exquisitely sung by Braham," whilst "its accompaniment, for violoncello obbligato, should not be passed over;" and concludes his remarks by saying, "We cannot but congratulate our musical friends upon another composition of the highest order added to their modern stores, to the contradiction of those who have declared that art is exhausted, and that its decline and fall must succeed the triumphs of Handel, Mozart, and Beethoven."

Notwithstanding the unfavourable opinion expressed by the musical critic of the *Times* upon the quality and character of

* See above, p. 36.

Mendelssohn's *St. Paul*, the impression its performance at Liverpool had made upon the professional musicians engaged in its interpretation was so strong, that it was not only given at Exeter Hall by the Sacred Harmonic Society—which had then been but recently established, and of which I shall have to speak in a future chapter—on Tuesday, March 7, 1837, and repeated at the same place on Tuesday, September 12 of the same year, but was made one of the chief "features" of the Birmingham Musical Festival of the same year (Friday, September 20), under the immediate superintendence of the composer himself. On the latter occasion, the musical critic of that journal insisted, "Our opinion of its character is substantially unchanged. . . . . The style is that of a past age, and hence there are few new effects to be developed, no intricacies to unravel, and no disputable questions requiring the presence of the composer to settle or explain. Whether any composer possessing the talent which Mendelssohn unquestionably possesses will enhance his reputation by writing after a model, rather than following his own style, may be questioned. That style which is legibly stamped on his instrumental compositions, whether for his own instrument or for a band, disappears in his oratorio. Every trace of it is studiously effaced, and he appears only the imitator of Bach and Handel. This is the resource of weaker minds, and the refuge of feebler writers than Mendelssohn. Such was not the conduct of Haydn, the father of the modern school. His early writings were almost copies of his immediate predecessors; but as his musical horizon extended, he saw that an imitation even of the greatest writers would never suffice to make him a great and original composer. He therefore adopted a style of his own. The same may be said of the

greatest composers of the present day. We trace in the oratorios of Spohr an acquaintance with the great writers of his own country; but not a servile adherence to them. He has evidently profited by the labours of Bach and Handel and Haydn, but it is to make his own use of them. His language is not theirs, but his own. Such writers as Neukomm and Haser are mere pilferers—men who have acquired the art of arranging a score, but who trust to memory, not to imagination, to supply them with ideas. With such persons we have no intention to compare Mendelssohn. At the same time, it must be allowed that there is more of the technical skill of the musician than the imaginative fervour of the man of genius in *St. Paul.* We are rather attracted by the cunning of the workman than dazzled by the contemplation of his work. We admire the nice construction of the machine rather than the purpose for which it was constructed, the texture and complication of his fugues rather than their descriptive power. That they want the massy proportions of those of Handel was to be expected. Handel's step is that of a giant; Mendelssohn follows, and, of course, *haud passibus æquis.* There is also an inherent defect in the laying out of the work. An oratorio should be either entirely narrative, like the *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt,* or dramatic, like *Joshua, Jephtha,* and most of Handel's other oratorios. *St. Paul* confounds both; it is sometimes narrative, and sometimes dramatic. . . . These and such like anomalies, which are altogether gratuitous, weaken the interest and destroy the illusion of the scene. There is only one character whose individuality the composer has preserved, that of St. Paul. . . . The solos allotted to all the singers are few and sometimes feeble. The composer, evidently intend-

ing to concentrate the interest of the audience in the hero of his piece, has apportioned but little of his work to the soprano voice. These circumstances impart to *St. Paul* a similarity of colour, and that of rather a sombre hue, which is necessarily deepened by the prevalence of the minor mood. But with all these drawbacks, *St. Paul* yet displays much of the vigour of a master mind. Although its author has borrowed largely and liberally from Handel, not only thoughts, but entire passages, he has known where to glean with advantage, and he well understands how to turn them to good account. The chorales, which he has taken from Sebastian Bach, add relief, variety, and grace to the oratorio, and are, in fact, its most melodious features."*

In decided contrast to this "damning with faint praise," the critic of the *Athenæum*, September 23rd, 1837, writes, "For his (Mendelssohn's) oratorio, it would be difficult for us to say too much in its praise—simple, massive, every note of it full of expression, written in the spirit of the great ancients, but not according to their letter. We should be disposed, unhesitatingly, to rank it next to the immortal works of Handel, being persuaded that every subsequent hearing must bring its truth increasingly home to every listener. It includes no difficulties crowded together for the production of great effects, the resource of second-best genius. . . . The airs are as easy, as they must be delightful to sing; and the orchestra, though, when it is required, as rich and figurative as a master's hand, guided by a master's mind, can make it, is kept in its proper place—that is, working together with the vocal parts, neither predominating over them, nor lagging behind."

* See *Times*, Friday, Sept. 22, 1837.

Wholly coinciding with the laudatory remarks of the *Athenæum* concerning the merits of Mendelssohn's *St. Paul* —which time has proved to be much more correct than the cynicism of the *Times*—I now take my leave of a year (1836) most memorable in musical events, to pass onward to less exciting circumstances, which began to mark what may not unaptly be termed "the transition period."

It will have been remarked, that whilst referring* to a prediction of the *Athenæum* respecting the improbability of Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* being "heard at any great distance beyond the walls of the Académie Royale," an allusion is made to Mr. Henry F. Chorley having "occupied the post of musical critic of that journal in the year 1836." The cause of this fact being now known has arisen from a statement having been added to the announcement of the sudden death of that gentleman on the 15th of February, 1872, to the effect that he had been for thirty-five years engaged in such a capacity upon that journal. As the fact is equally well known that Mr. Henry F. Chorley's connection with the *Athenæum* as its musical critic ceased in the year 1870, and that he afterwards contributed to its columns only as a correspondent, and not at all during the two months preceding his decease—the *Orchestra* having been resorted to by him for publishing his communications to the public—it is conclusive that in 1836 he had commenced his career, which the style of the above remarks is calculated to confirm. Mr. Chorley, though not a regularly trained musician, had, generally speaking, a singularly clear appreciation of the art itself, and of the requirements for its legitimate progress, although he not unfrequently permitted his prejudices

* See above, p. 15.

—as some may have been inclined to designate many of his expressed opinions—to overrule his judgment. In spite, however, of this peculiarity—the result more of temperament, perhaps, than of affectation or ill-feeling—it is impossible to say of him than he ever pandered to the whims and caprices of *artistes*, however intimate he might have been personally with them, or made himself subservient to their desire for unworthy or undue commendation. Although an eccentric, he was essentially an honest and an upright man. This is a testimony I am only too happy to be able to pay to Mr. Henry F. Chorley's memory, although, whilst having had merely a passing acquaintance with him, I never was numbered amongst those whom he especially looked upon and esteemed as his friends.

CHAPTER II.

1837—40.

THE reference already made to the first performance in London of Mendelssohn's *St. Paul* by the Sacred Harmonic Society* necessitates that some information should be given as to the rise and progress of that most important institution—most important as having had an effect upon the progress of music in this country which is incalculable. The low state of choral music in London in 1832—the date of the establishment of this Society—would hardly be believed by the youngest choral amateur of the present day. In place of Sacred Harmonic Societies in every district of the metropolis, one small but venerable institution, the Cecilian Society, meeting in London Wall, was all that could be found, if a few half-private associations be excepted. It is true that the Ancient Concerts were still in operation, of which I have taken no notice in the course of these "Recollections," although I was present at very many of them, simply because they were "dry-as-dust" affairs, made up from year to year with "odds and ends" from old, and not unfrequently from comparatively modern, masters, slovenly performed, and carelessly conducted. These concerts, which at the time of the formation of the Sacred Harmonic Society

* See ante, p. 38.

had been in existence nearly sixty years, were essentially aristocratic in their constitution, and most pertinaciously exclusive of any other persons than of such as had the privilege of belonging to the "upper ten thousand." An outsider was able now and then to gain admission, but only to be wearied to death with the unceasing round of dull formality which marked the performances, which were directed in turns by an archbishop, dukes (royal and others), lords, and a member or two of the commonalty who had "blue blood" in their veins.* First instituted in 1776, these concerts expanded into a semi-royal institution in 1785, the year after the commemoration of Handel

* What was the character of the Ancient Concerts may be, in a measure, ascertained from the following progamme of one selected at random from a perfect collection in the possession of a friend:

PROGRAMME OF AN ANCIENT CONCERT, 1832.

Under the direction of his Grace the Archbishop of York.

Concert of Ancient Music, Wednesday, May 30, 1832.

ACT I.

First, Second and Fourth movements of *Dettingen Te Deum*—Handel.
Song, "Verdi Prati" (*Alcina*)—Handel.
Glee, "Let not rage thy bosom firing"—Arne and Greatorex.
Recit. and Aria, "Dove sono"—Mozart.
Chorus, "Lift up your heads" (*Messiah*)—Handel.
Musette (from the Sixth Grand), with additional parts by Greatorex—Handel.
Duet, "Sull' aria"—Mozart.
Song and Chorus, "Come if you dare" (*King Arthur*)—Purcell.
Scena, "Dov' e lo sposo" (*Gli Orazi ed I Curiazi*)—Cimaroso.
Chorus, "Achieved is the glorious work" (*Creation*)—Haydn.

ACT II.

Overture—Mozart.
Song, "Confusa abbandonata"—Bach.
Chorus, "In te Domine"—Buononcini.
Glee, "'Tis the last rose" (Irish Melody)—Greatorex.
Song, "I know that my Redeemer" (*Messiah*)—Handel.
Psalm xviii. (*St. Mathew's Tune*)—Dr. Croft.
Song, "Gia risuonar" (*Ætius*)—Handel.
Quintet, "Dovi pace" (*Flavius*)—Handel.
Chorus, "The many rend" (*Alexander's Feast*)—Handel.

at Westminster Abbey, when they received the patronage of George III., who became one of the directors. These concerts, inferior as they were, could offer no opportunities for the amateur of moderate means. They were set on foot for the gratification of an exclusive class of wealthy subscribers, who were at the utmost pains to maintain what they called their socially inherent rights. They deservedly received their death-blow on the rise of the Sacred Harmonic Society, and other more vigorous choral associations. The late Prince Consort, whose extended musical knowledge and acumen were very little understood, and much less appreciated, by the royal and noble directors of these concerts, stood out as an example of energy and perseverance by the introduction of many long-forgotten works into the programmes of such of the performances as were held under his own immediate direction; but even this did not avail. The Ancient Concerts had had their day; nothing could save them, and they passed away in 1848, under the conductorship of Sir Henry Bishop—who had become the tamest of tame conductors—after seventy years' existence, giving place to other more energetic associations, which, unfettered by mere traditions of the past, and moving with the times, kept pace in performance with that increasing choral musical knowledge of which the Sacred Harmonic Society was the pioneer.*

The first meeting of the Sacred Harmonic Society was held on the 20th November, 1832. It maintained, however, but a fitful existence until Midsummer, 1834, at which period it commenced its meetings at Exeter Hall. For the first twelve months the Society's meetings were held in Gate Street Chapel,

* See *The Sacred Harmonic Society, a Thirty-five Years' Retrospect* (for private circulation), London, 1867; to which the author is chiefly indebted for the details respecting that Society.

Lincoln's Inn Fields; but in November, 1833, the managers of that place suddenly withdrew the permission they had given, and compelled the Society to seek for accommodation elsewhere. When this untoward event occurred, the number of subscribing members was but thirty-one, and the financial means of the Society were so extremely limited that, for a time, its dissolution appeared to be inevitable. Strenuous exertions were, however, made to keep it in existence; but the efforts to obtain a suitable place to meet in were for some time unsuccessful. In the early part of 1834, a negotiation was commenced for renting a room in Exeter Hall, but certain restrictions then in force there occasioned a delay of several months before a favourable result was arrived at. Meanwhile the Society met for a few times at a chapel in Henrietta Street, Brunswick Square, and afterwards, from Lady Day to Midsummer, assembled weekly in a large room belonging to the Scottish Hospital in Fleet Street, which was rented for the purpose.

As originally constituted, Exeter Hall eschewed music. It required a special alteration of its constitution to admit even of sacred musical performances. To enable the meetings of the Sacred Harmonic Society to be held within its walls, the rules binding the directors of the hall were at length, after much trouble and harassing negotiation, relaxed, and the Society entered upon an occupation there in June, 1834; since which date music has become one of the chief sources of revenue to the managers and shareholders.

The first Amateur Musical Festival was held at Exeter Hall in October, 1834, and it owed its projection and prosecution entirely to the exclusion of many efficient metropolitan choral amateurs from the orchestra of the Musical Festival held in

Westminster Abbey in the preceding June, under the conductorship of Sir George Smart. The Abbey festival, as well as the amateur festival, gave a great impetus to choral music. The chorus for the former, besides the members of the cathedral choirs in and around London, was made up of country choralists. The latter was composed almost entirely of London amateurs. These being thus brought into union and association with most successful musical results, it was only natural they should desire to perpetuate those results by combining together, and thus the Sacred Harmonic Society received an accession of musical strength which has gone on increasing as years have rolled on.

It was a fundamental principle of the Society that all services rendered to it by its members should be purely voluntary and honorary. It, therefore, had no professional members. It did not owe its establishment either to any disruption of, or discord in, any existing musical institution. It rose into existence to satisfy a public want. Its steady lengthened progress has justified the anticipations formed by its promoters; and its freedom from professional jealousies and intrigues has been as marked as its path was clear and defined. This is shown by the following extract from its original prospectus:

"This Society has been formed in consequence of its appearing to several amateur practitioners of music to be desirable to establish, in a central part of London, a Society whose object should be the cultivation of a just taste for the higher class of compositions in sacred harmony, and the improvement of its members in execution, united with a desire to aid in establishing for the London amateurs of music the reputation, which has repeatedly been denied to them, of being able to perform

the sublime compositions of Handel, Haydn, and other eminent sacred composers, with that degree of precision and effect which their worth entitles them to, and which the development of their inherent beauties requires.

"In thus announcing the object of this Society, with a view to procuring that coöperation and assistance which are necessary to establish it with any degree of efficiency, its projectors wish it to be understood that it does not owe its origin, as many have done, to any division in a Society already established; and that the only motive by which they have been actuated in adding to the number of those previously in existence, has been the extension of those facilities which are afforded by combined efforts for improvement in the knowledge and practice of music, and of the peculiar gratification which that noble art is calculated to inspire.

* * * * *

"Its directors have been influenced by the threefold desire of insuring respectability for its character, efficiency to its exertions, and permanency to its existence."

With such objects there has been little or no opportunity for the introduction of novel but mediocre works, which, brought forward through undue interest, but too often lead to the failure of musical institutions of the highest pretensions. Not that the Society wished it to be understood that the members were adverse to novelty. They had always gladly welcomed it, but to suit the constitution of the Society, it had to be novelty of the *best* description. The concerts are given on a scale, and in an arena, far too large for mere experiment.

Another great feature in the operations of the Society was the determination of its managers, early arrived at, to avoid

the evils of incongruous selections although wholly of sacred music, and to perform the great masterpieces of Handel and other composers, if not in their entirety, at least in a connected form, that they might be listened to in such sequence that the intention and design of the composer could be understood. Up to this period, with the exception of the *Messiah*, a complete oratorio was rarely to be heard. *Israel in Egypt* was given at the Abbey festival in 1834;* but even in this master work interpolations and excisions were thought necessary on its re-introduction to the public. Besides the choruses which it was the custom to omit, even up to a more recent period, the great tenor song, "The enemy said," was also left out. If there is one thing more than another for which the musical public owe a debt of gratitude to the Sacred Harmonic Society, it is because of their steady adherence to this practice of producing connected works.

Up to 1836, the Society's concerts had been given in the small hall, Exeter Hall. The success of a concert given by the Society's aid in the large hall on the 28th June, 1836, for a charity, led immediately to its own concerts being henceforward held there. The first performance given on its own account in the large hall was the *Messiah*, on the 20th December, 1836. That oratorio, *Saint Paul*, the *Creation*, *Israel in Egypt*, the *Dettingen Te Deum*, and Mozart's "Mass No. 12," were all produced, with unvarying success, at the concerts in the large hall during the same year. Mendelssohn himself engaged to conduct the second performance of *Saint Paul* in September, and had conducted three of the rehearsals, but was only present as an auditor at its performance by the Society on the

* See vol. i. p. 312.

12th September, 1837, the Birmingham festival directors of the day conceiving it would be inimical to their interests, if that distinguished composer conducted the oratorio in London before its performance in Birmingham.*

Although, as connected with the years which this chapter embraces, it would be here appropriate to break off in the narration of the rise and progress of the Sacred Harmonic Society, it yet seems to be so much more preferable to carry that narrative directly forward, that I trust I may be excused for adopting such a decision.

On the 10th March, 1843, Mendelssohn's *Lobgesang* was first performed by the Society; and, although comparatively inefficiently rendered, at once secured the approbation it afterwards ever retained, since from that time to the present it has been a constant favourite, and always welcome to its members and subscribers. In spite of this one remarkable event, the Society did not make any considerable headway between the years 1837 and 1840, its efforts having been accepted with no especial mark of recognition by the public, whilst the upper classes of society seemed inclined wholly to ignore its existence.

In 1840, however, after the Society had given upwards of forty concerts in the large hall, it began, for the first time, to receive the highest patronage. The late Duke of Cambridge,

* It is worthy of notice with what perseverance the Society performed the works of Mendelssohn. Not a season passed in the ten years that elapsed before the production of *Elijah* without important works of that master appearing frequently in the programmes of the Society—a fact the more noticeable because, up to the period of the production of *Elijah*, Mendelssohn's works had failed to aid the Society's exchequer in the same ratio as the oratorios of Handel and other known composers. As one of the many points for congratulation in the history of the Society, this early steady persistence in performing the great sacred choral works of Mendelssohn is noticeable.

the Queen Dowager, and the Duchess of Kent were amongst the distinguished visitors attending the Society's concerts. Besides the *Messiah* and *Israel in Egypt*, other oratorios of Handel—viz., *Judas Maccabeus, Solomon, Sampson, Joshua, Saul,* and *Jephtha*—had been brought out. To most of these, additional accompaniments were added by the late Mr. George Perry,* who for more than fifteen years was leader of the Society. The addition of these extra accompaniments by that musician was always a vexed question. By some they were decried, by others lauded. Whatever their merits or demerits, it cannot be questioned that they materially aided in the general *ensemble;* equally so that, in the present day of large orchestras, Handel's scores require judicious additions of this nature.

About this period the metropolis witnessed the most frantic efforts to make its inhabitants suddenly proficient in music as well as in other arts and sciences, by public lectures and class-teaching. With those other arts and sciences these "Recollections" have no concern. It is with music only in its connection with the Sacred Harmonic Society, that they propose to treat. The success of a handful of mere amateurs in achieving a great choral reputation led to a desire on the part of thousands to follow the example thus set them. The classes established by Mr. Hullah at Exeter Hall were one of the results. Had the Society conceived it wise to travel out of the path so sagely

* Mr. George Perry was a native of Norwich, and received, in the cathedral of that city, his musical education, under the eminent tuition of Dr. Beckwith. He was himself the composer of several very clever oratorios, and was a thoroughly competent musician, although a man of very singular manners. He earned sufficient means of livelihood by playing the organ on Sundays at different places of worship in succession, and by a moderate amount of teaching. He was a good violinist, and well versed in the study of Handel and the old Masters. He died only a year or two ago.

prescribed for them in its original prospectus, they might have taken up successfully classes for general instruction in choral music. They purposely left this pursuit open to others. Under the *implied* support of the Council of Education, these newly-established classes started off with a brilliant flash, only to subside, at an early period of their career, into more sober and reasonable dimensions. At this time it was the ambition and expectation of nearly everyone so to run along "the royal road" to music as to gain, by a few lessons in digital manipulation, such a knowledge of its intricacies as would at least enable them to enter an orchestra side by side with the most competent choralist.

This movement had its day, but not without offering battle to its parent, the Sacred Harmonic Society, which at one time it was proposed to *expel from Exeter Hall*, that its nights of practice and performance might be given up to the musical and other classes, pompously placarded as being under the Committee of Council of Education. It was well for the proprietors of Exeter Hall that the Society was strong enough to prevent this purpose being attained, or the collapse in the value of their property might have been equal to that which threatened when Dr. Reid, the chemical lecturer—a coadjutor of the musical lecturer—so nearly destroyed Exeter Hall by the sudden explosion of his bags of gas. Nothing can be further from my intention than to throw any ridicule over the exertions of Mr. Hullah, Mr. Mainzer, and other promoters of popular musical education at this period. They effected great good. Following in the wake of the Sacred Harmonic Society, their labours came at an opportune period. They have been fraught with good results, not only to the Society, but have also

aided in awakening in all classes, and in distant countries, the desire to attain to musical excellence. If it is now found that the ladder with but few steps, leading to real musical ability, which was set up in those days of universal classes, has some of its rungs more out of reach, and only accessible through longer continued labour than was at that time supposed; still great good has been gained by the emulation thus stimulated, and tens of thousands, both old and young, now rejoice in that knowledge and practice of vocal music which would never have been arrived at by them but for the stimulus afforded by the exertions and examples herein detailed.*

A noticeable event in the operations of the Society in 1843 was the production of Spohr's oratorio, the *Fall of Babylon.* That work had been composed for the previous Norwich Festival, where it had been produced under the conductorship of Professor Edward Taylor; the Elector of Hesse Cassel, the *employer*—he cannot be designated by a more courteous title—of Spohr, having refused him permission, *after twenty-five years' service,* to visit England to conduct it in person. In the

* As not inconsistent with this subject, allusions may here be made to the urgent need of an adequate *Conservatoire* or school of music. No country recompenses artistes of the highest standing better than England. No country takes so little trouble to educate home musical talent. From all nations vocalists flock to this country; with a proper Musical Academy, native artists might supply the places of scores of these. At an early stage of the history of the Society, its members placed the daughter of a deceased valued member in the Royal Academy of Music. Had that institution fulfilled the requirements of the times, help might have been extended to it, but at a general meeting of the Sacred Harmonic Society a few years since the proposition of a member to vote £50 yearly to the present Royal Society of Music in Hanover Square was negatived unanimously. It was, however, coupled with the assurance, that should an adequate *Conservatoire* be projected and placed under able management, the Society would be highly pleased to aid other exertions in every possible manner.

following June Spohr availed himself of his usually stipulated vacation, when he was free from his Elector's trammels, and, at Professor Taylor's instigation, visited London, where, at the Hanover Square Rooms, on Friday, July 7th, 1843, the *Fall of Babylon* was again performed, the composer himself conducting. From some unexplained cause, the financial results of this performance were most lamentable. Small as is the concert-room in Hanover Square, it was not one-third filled. The performers, although by no means numerous, positively outnumbered the audience. Some members of the Sacred Harmonic Society, who were present at this untoward performance, conceived that it would be a great discredit to the metropolis, and that it would be doing an injustice to a distinguished musician, if Spohr were allowed to return to Germany under impressions such as the meagre attendance in this small room to hear his work—which had been previously produced with so much enthusiasm at Norwich—must have given rise to. They, therefore, at once opened a communication with him through Professor Taylor, begging that the Society might be permitted to produce the oratorio at Exeter Hall before his return home. Met at first by a decided refusal, it was only after the most earnest solicitation that a reluctant consent was obtained from Spohr to allow this second performance of his work in London. Prominent among the reasons for this hesitation was his feeling that sufficient time could not be given for the adequate rehearsal of amateurs in such a complex choral work as *Babylon*. Assured that the Society would not allow such a reason to stand in the way, if any exertion on the part of its members could overcome the difficulty, the rehearsals were undertaken in sections, while Spohr proceeded on a few days' visit to Wales and other places. On his return

he conducted the final rehearsals at Exeter Hall, and expressed his gratification of the manner with which the choral effects were rendered, in the following terms, by a letter which he wrote home:—

"At the grand rehearsal I was really much moved both with its excellent execution, and the conviction that such a number of persons totally strangers to me, and for the most part engaged in business—who in London have, indeed, but little leisure time—should have devoted their evenings to a late hour, during his absence of eight days, to the study of this difficult work, from pure love of it, and to afford me an agreeable surprise."

Of the performance itself, I can myself testify that it was in all respects as successful as could have been desired.

At the conclusion, the audience, at a loss to find a new and farther way of expressing their rapture, demonstrated it more prominently by mounting at once upon the benches. When at length Spohr had made his way through the mass of those who pressed forward to shake hands with and congratulate him as he passed on to the door of the hall, it was observed with astonishment that the whole company remained behind, and were whispering to one another, which induced the idea, as was the fact, that something extraordinary, or at least important, was still to take place. After a time, the noise broke out afresh, and Spohr was again vehemently called for. Upon this, two gentlemen led him back once more, and having informed him that the public much wished him to address a few words to them, he at length determined to do so, and made a short speech to them in German, which, though it was not generally understood, was very enthusiastically received by the assembly.

Hereupon, the President stepped forward, and, having delivered an address to Spohr in English, presented to him, in the name of the company, a large silver salver, with a beautifully engraved inscription commemorative of the evening festival, &c. This gratifying concluding scene crowned all that Spohr had yet experienced, and no incident of his life was afterwards referred to by him with greater pleasure than this performance of *Babylon;* none of the many objects of esteem possessed by him were more prized or referred to with more gratification than was this trifling testimonial presented to him by the Sacred Harmonic Society.

In the following year (1844), Mendelssohn twice conducted *St. Paul* for the Society, the Prince Consort being present at the first of these performances, on the 7th of June of that year. *St. Paul* was given again on the 2nd of June in the following year, Her Majesty being present, accompanied by the Prince Consort.

The year 1847, as one of the most memorable in the history of the Society, needs especial reference. For the Birmingham Festival of the previous year, Mendelssohn had written *Elijah*— of which I shall have more especially to speak under the "Recollections" of that year. Triumphant as its reception had been, the work had not entirely satisfied its conscientious author. He, therefore, took it back with him to Germany, and in the following spring the Sacred Harmonic Society enjoyed the honour of the first production of the work in its now published and well-known comprehensiveness. An invitation was given by the Committee to the composer, to conduct the performances of the oratorio in London. This was accepted with readiness, and four performances of this great popular *chef-*

d'œuvre took place at Exeter Hall by the Society on April 16th, 23rd, 28th, and 30th. To say that Exeter Hall was crowded with the most brilliant audiences ever assembled within its walls—Her Majesty and the Prince Consort were present on the second occasion—and that the oratorio was received with the greatest enthusiasm, is only to reiterate well-known and well-remembered facts. To many still connected with the Society, this brief period of association with their distinguished fellow-member—Mendelssohn had been elected an honorary member of the Society some years previously—was indeed a time of intense enjoyment and gratification. So far as lay in the power and ability of every member of the orchestra, it was their earnest aim, and their most anxious wish, to facilitate his labours, and to produce the great work, which he had honoured them by committing to their exertions, in the most perfect manner. It cannot, of course, be affirmed that either the chorus or orchestra of the Sacred Harmonic Society, or of the Birmingham Festival, were at that period in the same state of general efficiency as they are at the present time. Neither had enjoyed those opportunities for practice and teaching which happily have since fallen to the lot of each. The most intense zeal and nervous anxiety to satisfy the requirements of the "master spirit" labouring with them, were never in any degree wanting during the rehearsals of *Elijah* at Exeter Hall. They drew forth from Mendelssohn himself the warmest congratulations publicly to the orchestra; they were over and over again repeated to the members and intimate associates in the Society.

The most gratifying expression of sentiment which the Society was enabled to offer to Mendelssohn was the book

of words of the oratorio, in which the Prince Consort, with that kindly feeling so natural to him, had inscribed, at the respectful request of the Committee, the now well-known dedication to *Elijah*.

The Committee, on being entrusted by his Royal Highness with this pleasing tribute of esteem for Mendelssohn and his last great work, at once felt that so felicitous and expressive a dedication would in later times become matter for record in connection with the production of *Elijah*. The very short time which would elapse—only a few hours—between its presentation to Mendelssohn by a deputation from the Sacred Harmonic Society, and his departure from England, would not permit of leave being then obtained for its future publication. A *facsimile* copy of the inscription was therefore taken, which was carefully sealed up. Upon the news of Mendelssohn's premature decease arriving in England, the Committee caused an intimation to be conveyed to the Prince Consort, that this copy existed, and respectfully suggested that the permission to lithograph and circulate it would be highly prized by the Society. An immediate intimation was received by the Committee that his Royal Highness was much pleased to learn that the copy was available, and at once accorded his permission for its being lithographed and circulated. This dedication, couched in the following terms, was written in German, and was thus translated into English by the late Chevalier Bunsen, the well-known Prussian Ambassador to the Court of St. James's, and eminent *homme de lettres* :—

"To the noble artist who, surrounded by the Baal-worship of corrupted art, has been able, by his genius and science, to pre-

serve faithfully, like another Elijah, the worship of true art, and once more to accustom our ear, lost in the whirl of an empty play of sounds, to the pure notes of expressive composition and legitimate harmony,—to the great master who makes us conscious of the unity of his conception through the whole maze of his creation, from the soft whispering to the mighty raging of the elements. Written in token of grateful remembrance by

"ALBERT.

"Buckingham Palace,
April 24, 1847."

It cannot be described how deeply gratified and moved Mendelssohn was on receiving this truly affectionate token of sympathy. His rapturous exclamations of delight, as over and over again he read each word of the inscription, together with his repeated expression of fears of his inability adequately to acknowledge so touching a mark of appreciation, were again and again renewed.

At the close of the summer season of 1847, Spohr again visited England, at the invitation of the Sacred Harmonic Society, and conducted his *Fall of Babylon* twice, also his setting of Milton's version of the Eighty-fourth Psalm—which he brought with him to England expressly for production by the Society—his *Christian's Prayer* and *Last Judgment.* These performances unfortunately took place so late in the season—the end of July—that they were not attended with their usual success.

The opening of the year 1848 witnessed an important change in the Society. Mr. Surman, who had officiated as conductor from its projection in 1832 up to this time, retiring from that office, its musical arrangements were for the remainder of the

season delegated to Mr. George Perry,* who had acted as leader during the same lengthened period. As this change by no means satisfied those members of the Society who conceived that it might become a much more efficient musical organisation than it had hitherto proved, public intimation was given in September 1848 that the Society was prepared to elect a new conductor.

Many candidates offered themselves for this important musical office, but some members of the Society entertained hopes that Mr. Costa—who at that time had not appeared as conductor elsewhere than at the Italian Opera and the Philharmonic Society's Concerts—might be induced to co-operate with the Sacred Harmonic Society, if a somewhat unanimous intimation that such was the desire of the members were tendered to him. Such intimation was conveyed to Mr. Costa, on behalf of the Society, by the late Mr. R. K. Bowley, and the office of conductor to the Society was accepted by him. From the 1st of November 1848 to the present time, the concerts of the Society and the public have enjoyed advantages arising from their connection with Mr. Costa to which they were previously strangers.

It is worthy of remark that the only important inquiry Mr. Costa made of those who invited his co-operation was, whether, if he undertook the vacant office, the amateur members of the orchestra would place themselves as unreservedly under the sway of his *bâton*, and would attend rehearsals as diligently, as the professional members of the orchestra, over whom he was accustomed to exercise the strictest control. Upon being assured that he might fully rely upon amateurs being even more ready, if possible, than professors to profit by his

* See above, p. 51.

guidance and instruction, he entered upon his new office, expressing his conviction that the Society possessed within itself means for the accomplishment of much greater musical results than had hitherto been attained. How far that conviction has been fulfilled, the history of the numerous concerts given by the Society in Exeter Hall, and the great musical Festivals undertaken by the Society under his direction, unmistakably attest. To the Sacred Harmonic Society the change gave renewed life and vigour. Under the conductorship of Mr. Costa there has been accorded to it the praise of being the leading musical institution of its class in the world.

In the same month, September 1848, in which Mr. Costa was appointed conductor of the Sacred Harmonic Society, he also received his engagement as conductor of the Birmingham Musical Festival, thus enabling those who had brought about his *début* in that town nearly twenty years before,* to rejoice that through their instrumentality such advantages had been rendered available to executive music in England as have proceeded from the accidental circumstance—it may be said—of Mr. Costa's engagement at the 1829 Birmingham Festival, on the request of Signor Zingarelli. Long may it be ere Birmingham or London is deprived of such association! These ties are too important to the art generally, and to the professor or amateur individually, to be loosened without the gravest consideration.

After the appointment of Mr. Costa, the concerts of the Society were more than ever sought after. The performances themselves were also judged by a higher standard. Criticism upon them became more precise. Faults and progress were more carefully watched, and more minutely recorded. On the

* See vol. i. p. 177.

23rd of February, 1849, *Israel in Egypt* was first performed under the direction of the new conductor, the Prince Consort being present at a repetition of the same oratorio on the following Thursday, March the 1st. Mendelssohn's *Athalie*—the illustrative verses recited by Mr. Bartley—was given for the second time by the Society on the 22nd of June, Her Majesty and the Prince Consort both being present. This was an exceedingly fine performance of this now favourite work. The *Antigone* and *Œdipus*, with the *Midsummer Night's Dream*, had been performed at Buckingham Palace prior to this. It was with great satisfaction, therefore, that the Society had been enabled to introduce to their subscribers, on the 30th March, a similar work of Mendelssohn, but on a sacred subject. The numerous opportunities which many of the members of the Society have enjoyed in taking part in the very interesting choral performances given by Her Majesty and the Prince Consort at Windsor Castle and Buckingham Palace, under the direction of Mr. Anderson, the late master of Her Majesty's private band, are fraught with the most pleasurable reminiscences. These performances during a long series of years were of no small importance in leading and maintaining the public taste for choral music in a truly artistic direction, and as their varied selections gave the highest indications of the extended musical knowledge of his Royal Highness, allusion to them here, however brief, may not be regarded as out of place.

The improvement which had become manifest in the performances of the Sacred Harmonic Society, and the higher standard by which those performances were judged, led to pressure being applied in a quarter which had hitherto obstinately refused any step towards improvement. Exeter Hall—erected

in 1829, for the purpose of religious meetings and May anniversaries, then much in fashion with certain classes—had long been regarded by the Society and by the press as one of the worst-contrived buildings in which by any possibility a great choral performance could be given. It was simply the most spacious building in London. There its merits ended. Built with a deeply recessed lantern roof, the unobstructed portion of the Hall formed a square of about seventy-seven feet. Beyond this square were chambered recesses seventeen feet in depth, with ceilings much below the lower main roof of the hall. These were supported and masked by six square massive pillars and pilasters, connected with each other by very deep architraves. Half the tone produced by the orchestra was absorbed in the lantern. The pillars, pilasters, and architraves obscured and confused the tone produced, and shut out a large portion of the chorus from sight of the conductor and audience. The organ, built as shallow as possible, was placed with its back against a wall projecting nearly twenty feet into the orchestra. It thus overtopped and weighed it down. Mendelssohn had remarked, when he conducted his *Elijah*, that he felt "crushed" by this projecting mass. It cut the chorus completely in half. So bad was it, that in the double choruses of *Israel in Egypt* it was barely possible for one side of the orchestra to hear what the other was doing.

The appointment of Mr. Costa as conductor of the Birmingham Festivals had raised the efficiency of these great triennial music meetings to such a hitherto unknown pitch of executive orchestral excellence as to excite the warmest encomiums. The members of the Sacred Harmonic Society felt that to second the efforts of their conductor, and enable the Society to main-

tain its due position in the friendly rivalry which existed between the two institutions, alterations of great extent must be made in the Society's *locale*. Emboldened also by that complete spirit of union and determination which had existed since the appointment of Mr. Costa, and therefore stronger in purpose than at any former period, it renewed its representations to the directors of Exeter Hall. The committee pointed to the utter unfitness of the hall for oratory as well as for music; but it was only when, as a last resort, the resolve of the Society was communicated to the directors of that building, that effective alterations *must* be made in Exeter Hall, or the Society would forthwith promote the building of a new and enlarged music-hall, and migrate thereto, that these representations were heeded.

The alteration of Exeter Hall was so manifestly beneficial in adding to the effect of the performances of the Society, that the wonder afterwards was that prejudice and inertness should so long have stood in the way of such an obvious improvement. Suffice it to say, that the performances which immediately ensued, and which carried the Society so successfully through the year of the first Great Exhibition in 1851, were greatly aided by the alteration of Exeter Hall. Much of the financial success which attended the Society during this period arose from its having an improved *locale* in which to permit its able and energetic conductor more fully to develop the resources of the Society.

After the retirement of Mr. Surman* in the early part of 1848, the Society had to contend with some opposition, which, however, only lasted a few years. It then died out, from causes which would have involved the parent Society in ruin, had not

* Mr. Surman died recently.

the alteration in the conductorship in 1848 previously alluded to been brought about.

The advent of the first Great International Exhibition of 1851 was looked forward to with interest by the members of the Sacred Harmonic Society. Without professing to have entertained many prescient glances of the great future opening to the Society and to choral music by the Crystal Palace of Paxton, it was yet felt that the vast edifice arising in Hyde Park, and which was shortly to be opened by a great state solemnity, ought to have, as a valuable adjunct, such an exhibition of choral and orchestral music as would adequately display to the representatives of the invited nations the real state of executive music in England.

It had been originally determined by the Commissioners—probably in accordance with some supposed prescriptive usage on state occasions, but wholly at variance with the principles of a progressive work like that of the Exhibition of 1851—that the choirs of the Chapel Royal, St. Paul's, and Westminster Abbey, accompanied on one of the exhibitors' organs, by the state composer or organist of the day, should be the only musical executants at the expected gathering of 40,000 persons on the 1st of May, 1851. Members of the Sacred Harmonic Society, when they heard of this determination, combated it, as only serving to make music ridiculous at a great national solemnity. They urged that such a meagre musical gathering, in such a hitherto undreamed-of space, was absurd in itself, and would prove most injurious to musical art in England. A very few days before the opening of the original Crystal Palace in Hyde Park, the views thus expressed, urged pertinaciously, were found to have produced some effect, and ultimately the Society was

permitted, on the recommendation of the Prince Consort—who was always among the foremost to adopt improvement even at the expense of antiquated precedent—so to extend the musical force employed, that the Society's orchestra was added to the handful of choirmen and boys who were originally destined to exhibit choral music at the opening of this great national undertaking. The expense of engaging professional instrumentalists and the cost of music was defrayed by the Society. No orchestra could, however, be built, nor was the Society in anywise responsible for the general musical arrangements. The music was conducted by Sir George Smart and Sir Henry Bishop, and, being without a proper orchestra, the band and chorus, with the solo singers and conductors, were all huddled into three sides of a square formed by the gallery of the great transept. As all the performers were on the same level, mixed up with exhibitors' cases, and crowded up by unauthorised officials—who would take and hold possession for their friends of the best and most prominent situations—it is no wonder that the music produced little or no effect, or that when the attempt was made six months afterwards to close the Exhibition with due musical solemnity, the proposal was treated with indifference, the result being that the closing took place in a complete scramble.

For the sake of immediate contrast it may be permitted here to refer to the opening of the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, on the 10th June, 1854. Again the same members of the Society urged that such an important undertaking should not be inaugurated without an adequate musical celebration. As the Crystal Palace was only a commercial institution, it was happily untrammelled by any supposed ties connected with state

ceremonies necessarily under the control of official musicians, who, however estimable in themselves, were not accustomed to musical organisation on a very extended scale. The Society, of course, would do nothing at Sydenham unless under the guidance of its able conductor. The conductor, in like manner, would undertake no musical display there, unless provided with such an orchestra as would enable him to display his augmented forces to the best advantage. Fortunately, the then directors of the Crystal Palace, having the public to please, felt that every possible exertion must be made in that direction, the result being, that for the first time on record, the large force of 1710 carefully selected instrumentalists and choralists from all parts of the country were assembled together, under the *bâton* of Mr. Costa, to give due expression to the musical portion of that magnificent and interesting ceremonial. To show the spirit existing in the musical profession, the whole of the artists engaged afforded their gratuitous co-operation. In the chorus were to be seen Grisi and Mario, Lablache and Formes, Tamberlik and Ronconi, and nearly every other solo vocalist in London, with other artists of the highest eminence and renown. The entire professional and amateur band of the Society, with numerous other professors and amateurs of eminence and station, were included among the instrumentalists, and it may truly be affirmed that so grand a musical organisation, under such complete control, and so satisfactorily displayed, had never before been witnessed. Even now, contrasted with what has been done in any other country, that event remains without precedent and without rival.

To revert to the period following the opening of the 1851 Exhibition. During nearly the whole of the following six months,

the Society gave weekly performances of some popular oratorio. These were invariably crowded to repletion by most enthusiastic audiences, mostly provincials or foreigners. The reputation of the Society was extended in distant quarters. Its example, thus brought under the notice of tens of thousands of dwellers in distant parts, has been followed by them in their respective homes, and England at length was often cited by foreigners as in a fair way of "becoming a musical nation," whose example at least in large choral exhibitions might be advantageously followed.

After the Exhibition had closed, Haydn's *Seasons* was brought out by the Society for the first time at Exeter Hall on the 5th December, 1851. In 1852 Spohr again visited this country. His visit to the Society this time was not to conduct, but to listen to his oratorio *Calvary*—otherwise called the *Crucifixion*—conducted by Mr. Costa. Spohr's journey to England was for the purpose of superintending the production of his opera, *Faust*, at the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden, which will be referred to under that year. Advantage was taken of the composer's presence in London to perform *Calvary* under Mr. Costa's conducting, which completely overpowered Spohr himself, so much so, indeed, that he was obliged to agree in the remark of his friends, that the effect in many parts, especially that of the powerfully imposing choruses, was more immense than he himself could ever have conceived.

Passing over succeeding years, during which about twenty performances were annually given by the Society, all marked by the unvarying care and watchfulness of the conductor, and incidentally alluding to two magnificent interpretations of Beethoven's Mass in D, in 1854, we arrive at 1856, on the

25th of April of which year the Society performed, for the first time in London, *Eli*, the first oratorio composed by Mr. Costa. Like Mendelssohn's *Elijah*, Mr. Costa's *Eli* was written for Birmingham, and first produced at that festival on the 29th August 1855. The success it met with there—which I myself witnessed, and of which a more full and detailed account will, under that year, be needful—was only a prelude to that which it attained when subsequently performed at Exeter Hall by the Sacred Harmonic Society, on the 15th February, 1856. It was twice repeated at Exeter Hall in the following fortnight, and was again performed by the Society, for the fourth time that season, on the 25th April; since which period it has been one of the "stock" oratorios of the Society.

The exertions of the Sacred Harmonic Society may be said to have culminated, when, during the season of 1855-6, it determined upon keeping the approaching centenary of Handel's death with an appropriate commemoration; but as that is by far too wide a subject to be entered upon at present, the foregoing *résumé* of its operations must thus far be concluded, its larger undertaking being left for consideration when the actual period of their manifestation shall be reached.

The concert season of 1837 may be dismissed without the slightest reference. No new-comers of any kind made their appearance, a lull having evidently set in, that was by no means extraordinary, considering how great had been the influx of novelties in the two or three previously preceding seasons. Equally dull and dreary was the operatic season. One or two candidates for fame and fortune appeared, of whom notably Miss F. Wyndham—who afterwards became

the wife of Signor F. Lablache—and Mdme. Albertazzi,* were only worthy of consideration; but they created little or no sensation, and never for a moment dispelled the calm which seemed to have settled upon all the musical transactions of Her Majesty's Theatre during the season. One event alone gave it any claim for recognition—the production of Mr. Costa's *Malek Adel;* which, produced under every possible advantage, offered the most convincing assurance that the musical director was as competent to write for, as to direct, an orchestra. The only fault attaching to this work was truly enough expressed, when it was said, with but too speedily fulfilled prediction, that "depending," as it did, "upon Grisi's exquisite singing, and Lablache's imposing attitudes, and those wondrous high notes of Rubini, which must pass away with the present corps, the greater portion of its success could but be ephemeral," notwithstanding that its "intrinsic and permanent merits proved it to be the work of a man of talent."†

Although a disposition prevailed in certain quarters to "damn this work with faint praise," the following appreciation of its qualities may be accepted as perfectly just and accurate: "There is more dramatic fitness in the music, a closer adaptation of sound to sense, than is met with in most of the works of the younger writers of Italy. If there be a want of fresh and spontaneous melody—which could hardly be expected from one *bathed,* as is our *mœstro,* in other people's music from

* Mdme. Emma Albertazzi, an English woman, born May 1, 1814, was the daughter of a music-master named Howson. She received her first lessons as a singer from Sir M. Costa. After a somewhat chequered career, attended with more or less success, upon the Continent, she returned to London, and died there in the month of September, 1847. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens,* tom. i. pp. 51, 52.

† See *Athenæum* for 1837, p. 388.

January to December—there is much rich and expressive harmony; and the orchestra and chorus are admirably employed. As bearing out the character just given of the composition, the whole close of the second and the commencement of the third acts must be particularised; and were we to trust ourselves to speak of the performers, each of whom Signor Costa has fitted *à merveille*, a respectable pamphlet might be written from the notes of admiration which fill the pages of our *libretto*."*

On the 6th of June Grisi played and sung in Rossini's *Semiramide*, Madame Albertazzi being the Arsace, and a Signor Di Angioli the Oroe, who proved a failure, whilst Ivanhoff as Idreno was more feeble and listless than he had ever previously been known to be. Even Madame Albertazzi failed to make any impression as Arsace, which part was too low for her voice. Her endeavour to overcome this all but insurmountable difficulty, and to render it more effective by constant changes, planned without anything like efficient design, was praiseworthy; but as "no two ornaments or substitutions that had been set down for her had any family likeness, save in their resolution to display the wide compass of her voice, the result was, not only an inevitable loss of effect, so far as the music was concerned, but an inevitable want of success for the lady, with all such as were not wonder-struck by *roulades*, no matter how ill applied. Her acting too was very tame." Of Grisi's personation of the title *rôle*, a very different opinion was recorded, for "her performance was another specimen of the gorgeous in singing, and the appropriate in action." It was admitted—and it could scarcely be otherwise—that "nature might have denied her the depth and grandeur of passion,

* See *Athenæum* for 1837, p. 388.

which Pasta threw into the character; but she gave increasing evidence of the possession of feeling, as well as of force and brilliancy; and those two qualities, as they afterwards ripened, served to place her on far higher ground than many, whilst admitting her talent, had been led to suppose she would ever be able to occupy." Tamburini—as I well remember—was the Assur of that eventful night, and it being his best character in any of Rossini's operas, afforded a rich treat. That his version of the character has never been touched by any one of his numerous successors, is a truth that is by no means to be denied. That it was a bold step on Grisi's part to have entered upon the domain of her still most formidable rival, Pasta, in one of that great *prima donna's* grandest achievements, must be allowed, especially as but a few nights afterwards that rival re-appeared in Zingarella's *Romeo*. How great a favourite Pasta still remained was indeed testified by the enthusiastic reception accorded to her by an immense audience, who called for her at the end of the first act, and when the opera was over, covered her with heaps of flowers, which for once, it was believed, had *not* been bespoken for the occasion. "What matter, if age had made her voice at times tremulous, at times uncertain, and coarsened the outlines of her figure, and the traits of her fine countenance? She was still, in right of the true feeling that impelled but never overmastered her, in right of the strong intellect which directed every tone of her voice, every change of her countenance, the unapproached queen of the Italian stage; more admirable, with all her defects, than the best among her compeers that were still in unimpaired possession of every good gift."* On Thursday, June 29, Pasta again appeared at

* See *Athenæum* for 1837, p. 469.

M. Laporte's benefit, in a selection from *Tancredi*. That evening's entertainment, which occupied *six* mortal hours, included the whole of *Anna Bolena*, besides the selection from *Tancredi*; but on this occasion the great *artiste* was by no means in good voice. Whether the music she had to sing was more fatiguing than that of *Romeo*, or that there was but little scope for her unequalled acting, the general effect was less impressive than on the previous occasion of her reappearance. On Thursday, the 6th of July, for her own benefit, and on the following Thursday for M. Albert's benefit, she undertook her greatest part—that of Medea.* On each of these occasions it was but too palpable that the voice was wholly marred, for without a word of exaggeration, she was "singing a quarter of a note too flat from the *entrata* to the *finale*." But her "acting was so incomparable as to make the audience all but forget this serious drawback." One well capable of judging, and whose opinion upon music and musicians will always remain worthy of record, thus closed his remarks upon this performance, the last at which either he or I would ever again "assist:"—

"It is easy to single out a few technical excellences—to recommend as a study to the tragedian the management of her attitudes, by which stature and dignity are given to an undersized and even awkward figure; to the musician the bold and thrilling effect produced by her suppressed shake at the close of her grand scene with her children; but adequately to describe her personification of the Colchian sorceress *as a whole* requires time, and space, and language beyond our powers; and we shall close by drawing on a poet (Barry Cornwall) for a line or two of true and heartfelt homage:—

* See vol. i. p. 268.

'Never till now, never till now, O queen,
And wonder of the enchanted world of sound,
Never till now was such bright creature seen,
Startling to transport all the regions round!
* * * * * * *
I see thee at all hours—beneath all skies,
In every shape thou tak'st, or passionate path;
Now thou art like some wingèd thing that cries
Over a city flaming fast to death.
Now, in thy voice, the mad Medea dies,
Now Desdemona yields her gentle breath;
All things thou art by turns—from wrath to love—
From the queen eagle to the vestal dove.'" *

The operatic season of the year 1838 began with an event before Easter most unusual—the *début* in Bellini's *Sonnambula* of a really great *artiste*, Madame Persiani, the wife of Joseph Persiani, a dramatic composer, born at Recanati, in the States of the Church, about 1805, who was educated at the Conservatoire, Naples, under the tuition of Tritto, the uncle of Sir M. Costa, and became the composer of several operas of more or less celebrity. Madame Persiani was the elder daughter of Nicholas Tacchinardi, a Florentine musician of considerable eminence, who trained her in a small theatre he had built at his country-seat near Florence, with other pupils, including Frezzolini, for the operatic stage. She made her *entrée* at Leghorn in 1832, and achieved so great a success that she was immediately engaged at Venice, then at Milan, and afterwards at Florence, Rome, and Naples, where she sung at the San Carlo in 1834, 1835, and 1836. In 1837 she returned to Venice, and then accepted an engagement at Vienna, where similar brilliant results attended her appearance. From Vienna she came to London, and after the operatic season of

* See *Athenæum* for 1837, pp. 523, 524.

that year, to which reference is now being made, she tried her fortune at Paris, where she *débuted* in the month of October at "Les Italiens," as Rosina in Rossini's *Barbiere*, and at once was pronounced by the musical *savans* of that capital to be worthy of the utmost admiration for her exquisite voice, as well as for the purity of her style. From this period to 1843 she alternated between London and Paris. A sudden hoarseness, however, seized her in the latter year, and so completely destroyed her voice that she was compelled to retire from her profession whilst yet in the zenith of her fame.*

Immediately upon Madame Persiani's favourable reception in London, public opinion, always guided by contraries, began to pit her as a formidable rival against Grisi, not a few being rash enough to insist that she would soon be "mistress of the situation." A greater mistake could scarcely have been made, inasmuch as, although the *débutante* was possessed of high merits, they were by no means equal to those which had placed the legitimate successor of Pasta at the very head of her profession, or likely to touch, much less to shake, the basis upon which the Diva's fame was fixedly established. The only rival that could possibly have done this was Malibran—and she was no more. Besides being deficient in histrionic genius and talent, Madame Persiani's vocal attainments could not endure comparison with those of Grisi. The quality of her voice was miserably thin, and she had an incessant propensity to sharpen every note she uttered. Her compass was great, reaching easily to E flat *altissimo;* but its *timbre* was faded even before she had left Italy for London. Madame Persiani excelled, indeed,

* See Fetis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. vii. p. 3, tom. viii. pp. 172, 173.

chiefly in flexibility, for she was essentially a florid singer, who ventured upon a thousand embellishments and changes for the mere purpose of exhibition; as, for example, in the last *rondo* of Bellini's opera, which she so gratuitously overloaded and altered, as to leave scarcely the ghost of a note as it had originally been written. Such *cadenzas* and embellishments were, however, in most instances new and original, belonging much less than was at that time usual to the invention of the singing master, than of the *artiste* who executed them.

In spite of every invention of this kind being exquisitely executed, there was a decided absence in almost all of them of "that presence of school, such as made Sontag florid *par excellence*, Pasta grand, and Malibran astonishing. Many of these embellishments also, besides having little or no relation to one another, often appeared to be inconsistent in themselves, and merely made up of fragments." In the matter of expression, Madame Persiani was delicate and refined, rather than forcible and passionate. As to personal appearance, although plain, she was by no means uninteresting. Her acting was pronounced *rightly* as being gentle and quiet, bordering closely upon coldness, yet not absolutely cold. Although possessed of a vehement temper, and a capricious and petulant spirit, she was as much too placid and patient in her several parts, as some amongst her predecessors were said to have been extravagant. She had talent enough always to command engagements, and to remain prominently before the public; but it would have been impossible to have met with a single individual, whose heart it could have been said she had ever touched. In spite of such deficiencies, the more felt then because of the extraordinary talent that was rapidly passing away, not again to

return in the lifetime of the most enthusiastic *habitué*, Madame Persiani was most enthusiastically received, a piece of good fortune which did not fall to the lot of her supporters—Signor Tati, an agreeable but feeble singer, whose voice bore but little proportion to his figure, which was that of a giant; and M. Boisragon, whose *début* as the Count, though highly creditable, failed to win popular esteem, although his voice was rich and sufficiently powerful, and his style, though unambitious, seemed to have been carefully formed.

Immediately upon the arrival of Rubini and Tamburini, they were conjoined with Madame Persiani in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, of which, on account of its recent success in Paris, the greatest expectations had been formed—expectations only in a measure fulfilled, inasmuch as after the first act all enthusiasm cooled; and though deservedly revived by the new *prima donna's* mad scene, and Rubini's version of "Fra poco," was not sufficiently vivid to enable the audience to go away satisfied that they had been presented with the *chef-d'œuvre* they had been promised. The opinion that was generally formed of this work by musicians at the time of its presentation, and with which I agree, has never been materially changed: "While in the *libretto* the original story suffered great dilution, a weaker musical composition it would be impossible to imagine." All that could be done to give it impulse was tried, but in vain; and even now, after innumerable "Lucias" have tried their best and utmost to give the title *rôle* life and interest, it remains one of the least satisfactory operas an audience can sit through—a circumstance of no great wonder, since most assuredly a second Persiani has never since appeared, and no such representatives of the *rôles* of

Edgardo and Henrico, as were Rubini and Tamburini, are ever again likely to be met with. Madame Persiani as the heroine displayed more passion and tenderness than she had hitherto put forth; but her voice suffered by the display, for she forced it, of necessity; and whenever it was so used, it immediately verged upon that meagre shrillness of tone that was always displeasing to well attuned ears. Her execution was surprisingly voluble, but though it could but be praised as most excellent for its finish, it left no such impression behind it as first-rate singing ought to have done.*

The close of the operatic season of 1838 was marked by an event which cannot be lightly passed over—the production of Mr. Balfe's *Falstaff;* a work which had long been promised and upon which the utmost pains had been expended to make it successful. Of its presentation I will venture to give the following particulars by the hand of Mr. H. F. Chorley, as they appeared immediately afterwards, since they are wholly to be relied upon, and are most justly and appreciatively recorded: "In this case an exception might be made to the dispraise which is generally the due of the contrivers of *libretti.* Rejecting all the accessory characters—as, indeed, was necessary—and involving Anne Page (Madame Albertazzi), in the huge love of Sir John Falstaff (Signor Lablache), and in the consequent tricks and contrivances of the 'merry wives' (Madame Grisi and Mdlle. Caremolli), Signor Maggioni has, otherwise, followed Shakespeare's play as closely, and with as much sprightliness, as the requisitions of the Italian Opera permit. In clothing with music the outline thus furnished, Mr. Balfe had the rare advantage of writing for such a corps of singers as

* See *Athenæum* for 1848, p. 259.

an English composer has rarely or ever been indulged with; and beyond this—of that thorough acquaintance with their several powers, styles, and inclinations which can only result from close intimacy. Such a position, indeed, would have been felt as a hindrance by a *maestro*, whose aim was rather to display ideas with reference to his subject than to write popular and effective melodies for his singers; but we expected that it would act rather as a spur in the present instance, Mr. Balfe having proclaimed himself, in his works, as belonging to the most modern Italian school. In this respect, however, we are disappointed. Setting apart Fenton's (Rubini) graceful *cantabile* in the second act—which, being written in the *contralto* scale, will be beyond the reach of any other tenor less extensively gifted with *falsetto*—we cannot think that any one of the parts offers its representative a happy opportunity for vocal display. With all the spirit and heartiness of her performance, the music given to Mrs. Ford (Grisi) appeared to us to become her only like her peaked hat—she could hardly look ill in whatsoever it pleased her to wear. Then the chorus given to the false fairies of Windsor Chase was a robust clumsy strain, fitter for the rude fiendship miners of Fridolin's foundry, than a troop of quaint hunters of the oak-tree shade. In like manner, the great orchestral powers of the Italian Opera House seemed to us unsatisfactorily employed. Throughout the opera a want of clearness is to be remarked in the instrumentation, which often, when heard, interferes with rather than supports the voices. But let us finish fault-finding—to which, be it recollected, an artist in the present ambitious and fortunate position of Mr. Balfe is strictly exposed—that we may enumerate the passages which have

lingered in our memory as effective and original. The first, is the trio between the wives and Anne Page. The opening movement is gay and delicate, and the *stretto*, for its loveliness, deserved its *encore*—though the writer has therein chosen to extend Bellini's illegitimate device in 'Suoni la tromba'—and in repeating the theme, to make the three denounce the 'ridicolo vechiacchio' in unison! The second is the entire duet between Falstaff and Master Brooke (Signor Tamburini). At the close of this, a melody, which had been felt as feeble and trivial in the overture, by being broken up into the form of dialogue, produced a pointed and spirited effect. But the best bit in the opera, to our thinking, is the opening of the basket scene, wherein Falstaff woos Mrs. Ford in a strain of large and genuine melody, at once bombastic and pleasing. From this point, however, the *finale* dwindles, and its close is positively vulgar. We have already adverted to Rubini's *cavatina* in the second act. There are some very graceful phrases in the earlier part of the duet, in which Mrs. Ford appoints the night-assignation in Windsor Chase, but its close is affected and unvocal. Madame Albertazzi's great *scena* is effective, though, in its opening, closely resembling Bonifichi's 'Ah che forse,' which Pasta's singing, and not its own merits, has imprinted in our memory. The final *bravura* given to Grisi is nothing more than a brilliant *solfeggio*—not half so graceful as the concluding *rondo* in its author's *Catherine Grey*, which we have always coveted to hear well sung. The *encores* were numerous, and, as a whole, the opera went off spiritedly." *

After Easter, 1839, Madame Persiani returned to Her

* *Athenæum* for 1848, p. 516.

Majesty's Theatre, choosing for her *re-entrée* the *Sonnambula*, as best suited to show off her peculiarity of manner to the best advantage. Grisi also returned to delight the *habitués* in *Anna Bolena* and *I Puritani;* but in this year's season very little was of importance, and might be passed over without any special reference, but that two events occurred, out of which the largest benefits arose for the prosecution of the progress of musical art—the *débuts* of Mdlle. Pauline Garcia and Signor Mario. With a few brief remarks upon two such events all that need be said of this year's season is narrated.

The first appearance of the only sister of Malibran, it might have been anticipated, would have drawn a crowded audience to Her Majesty's Theatre. Such, however, was very far from being the case. The house was not only thin, but it must be confessed that it was unappreciative also. Mdme. Pauline Viardot has often, in my hearing, referred to that event, expressing somewhat of astonishment that she should have survived it, because she felt she had not done herself justice, and feared that she would never become strong enough to overcome that terror with which an English audience impressed her, because she could not eliminate the idea from her mind, that, on account of her being Malibran's sister, more would be expected and demanded of her than she would ever be able to accomplish. And she was not far wrong in her opinion. Great as she afterwards proved herself to be, the English public treated her very much after the same fashion in which they dealt with Mr. Charles Kean, who, because he did not burst upon the world, as a boy, with all the brilliancy his father, as a man, had manifested, criticised him

most mercilessly, and even went so far as, in many instances, to say, that he never would be an actor at all. Although Mr. Charles Kean never became an Edmund Kean, he managed to live down this injustice to a considerable extent; yet none but those who knew him intimately can understand, even if they are aware of it, how fearfully the injustice that was meted out to him had crushed his spirit—so crushed it, indeed, that his days were doubtlessly shortened by means of the bitter recriminations, the studied neglect, and the discreditable insults to which he was to his dying day subjected. It is true that Mdme. Pauline Viardot has not been so similarly treated as to have suffered in like proportion, or to have been brought to a too early grave; but, after all, she has not much cause to remember the British public with gratitude, seeing what a niggardly welcome they accorded her when she was but a mere girl, and what a "cold coal" she always found them to be, to blow at, so long as she had to seek, from their patronage, the means of subsistence and applause. Like Mr. C. Kean, Madame Pauline Viardot was doubtless thrust before the public ere her powers were matured, or her voice—never of a particularly sympathetic quality—was thoroughly formed. Yet, notwithstanding the general public failed to perceive her latent talent—that only needed encouragement to obtain a brilliant development—there was one man at least who had sufficient power of intuition to perceive and to declare that "that girl was just as clever as her sister; Nature has not endowed her with the same brilliant voice, but the impulse is in her to be great, and great she will be, whoever lives to see it." That man was none other than Arthur, the great Duke of Wellington! Nay, not only did that illustrious man say this of Pauline Garcia, but, meeting

her one evening at a private concert, he went out of his way—a thing most unusual with him—to speak kindly to her, and give her words of encouragement and advice, which, as I well know, have never been forgotten.

Pauline Garcia débuted as Desdemona * in Rossini's *Otello*, in which she had seen and heard both her father and her sister, and I have no hesitation in asserting, that in several points she gave keener expression of pathos to the situation than her sister even in her palmiest days ever realised. In the great scene in the second act, not only did she master the passion of the song, and give all its happy passages with a fervour and a brilliancy positively extraordinary, her physical powers considered, but she reserved strength and enthusiasm enough for a cadence on the last "Io moriro," with a burst as magnificent as any to which her sister had ever given expression, and which made the general—not the critical—audience feel, for the first time, that a new genius was really before them. The whole of the third act, in point of singing, was yet more admirable. The willow song was given with an earnest and plaintive desolateness which made her version most touching—the *preghiera* in the true style of supplication, without one solitary ornament—and snatches of the recitative being uttered with a passion and an intensity belonging to the highest order of tragic pathos—not that which is taught in the schools, but which comes direct from the heart. †

Some few nights afterwards, Pauline Garcia improved upon this remarkable *début* by appearing in Rossini's *Cenerentola ;*

* Mdlle. Pauline Garcia made her first appearance on the lyric stage as Desdemona, in Paris, at the Odéon, when the Italian Opera Company was performing at that theatre.

† See *Athenæum* for 1849, p. 358.

but as I did not witness that performance, I must content myself with mentioning that her personation of this second character was said to have done more than establish her right to a place amongst the highest modern artists, inasmuch as throughout the whole part she manifested the still higher qualities of consummate musical understanding, feeling, and steadiness.*

Mario was by far more fortunate than Pauline Garcia in the reception he met with; for without manifesting a scintillation of that talent which has made his name proverbial as belonging to as great a tenor singer as the Italian stage has ever produced, and by relying upon his magnificent sympathetic voice and handsome personal appearance alone, he managed on the instant to win the affection of the public—a privilege that even now in his terrible decay he can by no means be said to have in the slightest degree lost. The part chosen for his *début* was that of Gennaro in Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*—one that he speedily made essentially his own. His voice at this time was sweet in tone and extensive in compass, some of its notes, however, not being quite free from that slight huskiness which practice alone could clear away, or, as in Pasta's case, convert from a blemish into a beauty. Never throughout his whole career could Mario overleap the difficulty of so blending the chest and head voice on the point of transition, as to defy its being detected by the most acute or thoroughly practised ear. With Rubini no distinction could be traced between the two. The quality was identical; but with Mario that peculiarity was at once to be traced. His expression was also natural and unforced; but at times his declamation

* See *Athenæum* for 1849, p. 470.

was most abrupt. Even then, as ever afterwards, he was greater as a *cantabile* than as a robust singer. His execution had no large means of being perceived in the *Lucrezia*, but, as it was thought, so it was speedily proved to be, raw, and somewhat uncouth, and requiring a large amount of cultivation to bring it into anything like requisite shape and finish. Indeed it may be said that Mario never overcame this defect, except in one part, that of Almaviva in Rossini's *Barbiere*, which he sang to perfection whenever he was in good voice. That defect was in him so much the more apparent, because it had been, on the admission of the whole world, Rubini's strongest point. The second part which he this season attempted was that of Pollione in the *Norma*, but herein he by no means improved the impression he had previously made. The recollection of Donzelli in the same opera had not been forgotten, and the comparison between the old and the new stagers was wholly in favour of the veteran, who had run his race, but had left his mark behind him.

Of the concert season of 1839 there is really nothing worthy of special remembrance, beyond the appearance of M. Artot, a violinist, who appeared at the seventh Philharmonic Concert, and manifested considerable delicacy of manipulation, and a suppressed passion and execution, "which rescued his playing from the charge of mannerism."

CHAPTER III.

1840—41.

THE operatic season of 1840 commenced with a performance of a now entirely and deservedly forgotten opera by Donizetti, *Torquato Tasso;* but which was then somewhat popular and hackneyed because of its prettiness, in contrast with the grim and gloomy *Parisina*, and also with the similarly-constructed *Lucrezia*—a work that has lived, in spite of its numerous defects, chiefly because of what was made of the heroine by Grisi. The *Torquato Tasso* was brought forward avowedly for the purpose of introducing a temporary *prima donna*, a Mdlle. de Varny, and Signor Coletti, an *artiste* who afterwards,* as it will be seen, became famous during the seasons his engagement was continued at Her Majesty's Theatre. The lady produced no great impression, but the gentleman made for himself a position immediately, not only because of his prepossessing face and figure, but because his demeanour was gentlemanly, and his voice, a baritone, good, and more especially since he

* Filippo Coletti was a Roman by birth, having been born in the Imperial city in 1811. He enjoyed in his musical studies the advantage of being taught for a short time by M. Busti, a professor of singing at the Royal College at Naples. He *débuted* at the Fondo Theatre in 1834, *Il Turco in Italia* being the opera selected for the occasion. Afterwards he sang at the San Carlo in *La Straniera* and the *Mosé*. Having made a reputation, he went the round of all the great opera-houses of the Continent, and came to London in 1840. Here he sustained his position for a few years with undeviating success. See Fêtis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. ii. p. 334.

also "sang with ease, finish, truth in time, and delicacy of expression."

Slowly and by no means successfully the season "dragged its slow length along," until Signora Emelina Tosi * was brought forward in the early part of April, not to displace Grisi or Persiani, but to be a sort of substitute for each or either of those *artistes*, should any untoward circumstances, such as temper, whim, caprice, or indisposition, prevent their appearance. Signora Tosi's engagement under such circumstances was scarcely fair either to herself or to the subscribers. She came with a tolerable continental reputation to London; but under the circumstances of this double rivalry, there was not much chance of her taking the same stand she had obtained elsewhere, and to which she was assuredly entitled. Besides being agreeable-looking, if not sufficiently striking in countenance and figure for great tragic parts, this lady possessed artistic characteristics that were by no means meagre. Her voice, although neither powerful nor extensive, was expressive, in spite of the upper notes being somewhat veiled. As a pupil of Pasta, she was entitled to respect and consideration; but independently of this advantage, she gave "both in singing and acting evidence of that thought and enthusiasm combined upon which for a basis an aspirant is able to surmount more difficulties than those who are indifferent or idle believe to be possible." Her artistic resemblance to her great teacher was more apparent in the recitatives of the opera she selected for her *début*—Bellini's *Norma*—than in the delivery of the

* Signora Tosi was to have been imported at a much earlier period by Signor Puzzi, who, however, brought in her place Signora Toso, now Madame Puzzi. See vol. i. p. 146.

melodies of that work. That delivery, however, was for the most part so broad and impressive, that it was evident there was genius as well as tuition to rely upon. "In the opening phrases of the duet with Adalgisa (Signora Ernesta Grisi) in the first act, and in the whole duet with Pollione (Signor Ricciardi), she not only sung but *said* her music in true style; whilst her embellishments and changes, if few, like her action and diction, bore traces of the superintendence of her whose smallest *appoggiatura* had a beauty, a meaning, and a power. Her acting was also instinct with feeling and passion, and could be followed with pleasure. She was undeniably a lyric *artiste*, who had been formed in the grand school, and as such was worthy of a "courteous welcome and respectful attention,"* which she scarcely obtained. Signor Ricciardi, although a less objectionable tenor than Signor Tati,† the last year's substitute until stars of a brighter magnitude appeared, was by no means sufficiently competent to uphold the character of Her Majesty's Theatre, whilst Signora Ernesta Grisi was little else than a *comprimaria* of the weakest force and power. Nothing but the presence of Lablache, in the part of Oreveso, the high-priest of the Druids, lifted the performance beyond the range of second-rate; but he being "greater than all praise," so took the whole affair into his own hands as to prevent what had otherwise been little else than a fatal *fiasco*. A few nights afterwards Rubini was heard for the first time in the *Lucia di Lammermoor*, and was singing as incomparably as ever; "nor could Coletti pass without commendation for the very able manner in which he executed so ungracious a

* See *Athenæum* for 1840, p. 299.

† See above, p. 77.

task as that of replacing Tamburini in one of that *artiste's* best parts. The house was crowded, and the larger part of the audience seemed to be satisfied with the substitution of the new-comer for the old favourite; but sufficient displeasure was evinced to indicate that a storm was brewing, the outpouring of which broke loose on Thursday, the 30th of April. On the previous Saturday the revival of *I Puritani*, with Coletti in the part of Ricardo instead of Tamburini, had been loudly declaimed against; but on this night the contest which had been going on between the subscribers and the management took the form of one of the most violent theatrical disturbances ever witnessed since the days of the celebrated O. P. riots in 1809, before which John Kemble, at Covent-Garden, had at length to succumb, although he fought the battle bravely for three months against the determination of the public.* *I Puritani* was repeated on this evening, and was heard in comparative quiet, although Coletti was subjected to the annoyance of being most unworthily insulted by frequent sibilations. When the curtain fell, however, at the conclusion, several voices began calling for M. Laporte, and shouting out, "Tamburini!" This went on for some time, not being very formidable, until the orchestra began the overture to the ballet —a new and afterwards favourite *divertissement* from *Une Nuit de Bal*, in which Cerito was to dance the principal part for her *début*—when the dissatisfied portion of the audience, who were chiefly situated in the stalls and side-boxes, burst out into such an uproar that it became impossible for the musicians to proceed. M. Laporte came forward and began making a very lame speech. He perceived that the indignation of the

* See Fitzgerald's *Lives of the Kembles*, vol. ii. pp. 119-138; Tinsley, 1871.

audience arose from his not having engaged Tamburini, and proceeded to explain that omission by saying that before Easter it was impossible to engage first-rate talent. "Easter is over," cried a voice. True, he admitted that Easter was over; but still, he had entered into arrangements, &c. Here came a torrent of groans and hisses which rendered him inaudible, a party in the "omnibus" box* being the ringleaders. M. Laporte so clearly perceived this, that in a few minutes his speech to the audience merged into a private conversation, carried on in a low tone of voice, with the occupiers of the "omnibus." The noise increased, and M. Laporte declared that he was not to be "intimidated"—a word which roused the "omnibus" party to a perfect fury. He retired, and the curtain rose for the ballet, in which Cerito was to have made her first appearance with Signor Guerra, also a *débutant*. The noise now became terrific; yells, hisses, and all sorts of uncouth sounds were blended in frightful discord. The leader found he could not make his fellow musicians hear him, and was forced to stop; the group of dancers that occupied the stage remained embarrassed and puzzled. The uproarious then began to pursue a particular line of policy. While there was no attempt to proceed with the performance, they remained quiet; but as soon as a single note was struck, or a violin was raised, the deafening noise began. The dancers, perceiving all attempts were vain, and at the same time being afraid to

* The stage of Her Majesty's Theatre extended for some distance beyond the proscenium into the house, and the "omnibus" box was situated on a level with the boards, upon the O.P. or left-hand side of the house, into which many of the young sprigs of nobility of that day felt it to be a distinction to be admitted.

quit the stage, seated themselves quietly round, to the great amusement of the occupants of the "omnibus." Again and again M. Laporte came forward and tried to bring matters to a settlement, at the same time compromising himself as little as possible. On one occasion he declared that, being manager, he had a right to engage performers according to his own discretion, and that he was not to be responsible to an audience—an assertion which only poured oil on the flames. At another time he said his engagements would not allow him to have Tamburini, or that he did not want to be ruined; but all statements of this kind were utterly useless, save to produce an augmentation of noise. He alluded to the many years he had catered for the amusement of the public, and this appeal *ad misericordiam* enlisted a few partisans on his side. The managerial party were chiefly in the pit, and raised the counter-cry of "Shame!" "No Tamburini!" "No intimidation!" while a gentleman of stentorian lungs shouted from a box, "Turn the 'omnibus' out!" It was a mistake, however, to identify the disturbance with the occupants of the "omnibus" box; for although those who were therein were very conspicuous, they represented the feeling of the house, and the stalls were amongst the most formidable who clamoured for the return of Tamburini. The dancers had now been for upwards of an hour on the stage doing nothing. There was no chance of anything being permitted to proceed, and the house began gradually to thin, the ladies having become excessively nervous and alarmed at the continuance of the uproar, and expectant of something more serious occurring before so unusual a scene could come to an end. The decided partisans on each side, however, held their ground without

showing the slightest signs of flinching; whilst not a few, myself amongst the number, remained for no other purpose than to witness the fun and to see what would come of it. Conversation in the pit now began to grow anxious. Men who had never spoken to one another before, and might never again recognise one another, put their heads together, and inquired, each according to his particular feeling, what the crisis would be which was now becoming more and more inevitable. At length there seemed to be some prospect of a good understanding being obtained. M. Laporte once more came to the front, and talked of reëngaging Tamburini "on conditions." The unfortunate word "conditions" again upset everything, and the supporters of Tamburini asked, "Will you engage him—yes or no?" M. Laporte answered that he would make proposals, and if— This would not do. "Yes or no?" reiterated his persistently-persevering interrogators. "Say no!" shouted his supporters. M. Laporte then began to talk about terms. "Same as last year!" unanimously vociferated the whole "omnibus." Upon this the badgered manager made his bow with the best grace he could put upon it, and retired without proposing anything more satisfactory. Every one was now thoroughly wearied and well nigh exhausted, when at last a gentleman who had occupied a box opposite to the "omnibus" stepped over the front upon the stage. He was immediately followed by a party, whilst the occupants of the "omnibus" jumped upon the stage from the opposite side; and thus, at one o'clock on the morning of May 1st, the Tamburinists held possession of the stage, waving their hats triumphantly as the curtain descended.

Mr. Lumley, in describing this uproarious scene, which he

has done with tolerable accuracy and fairness, asserts, that amongst the fashionable occupants of the "omnibus" box who leaped upon the stage was "a young prince of the blood," meaning the present Duke (then Prince George) of Cambridge. This might have been the case; but if it were so, I imagine that many still living who remember that night would be able to testify to such an assertion. Notwithstanding, however, every inquiry that has been made, except of his Royal Highness himself, I have never yet met with a single person who witnessed the present noble Commander-in-chief's first—and last—appearance on any operatic stage. It is but due to Mr. Lumley, however, to state, that after describing the "Tamburini row," as he designates it, he adds, "During the whirlwind of the elements, I had gone, as Laporte's chief coadjutor,* to the box of the Duchess of Cambridge, that I might entreat her Royal Highness to use her influence with the originators of the disturbance. I had even, at the suggestion of her Royal Highness, entered the very citadel of the foe, and exerted my efforts towards the establishment of peace. When, however, I demurred to the request that I would use my influence with M. Laporte to induce him to yield to the unreasoning and unreasonable exigencies of a coalition, my expostulations were unheeded, and the 'row' recommenced with undiminished vigour."†

Mr. Lumley attributes this event exclusively to a "cabal" that was formed against M. Laporte by the great Italian

* Mr. Lumley had become M. Laporte's agent and legal adviser in 1835, at the time when the pecuniary difficulties of the latter necessitated his passing through the Bankruptcy Court. See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 5.

† Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 16.

artistes of the period, whom he designates as *la vieille garde*. Those constituting that body, he asserts, so ruled within Her Majesty's Theatre, that not only was "the director's voice scarcely allowed in the selection of operas, or even in the choice of *artistes* to be employed," but that "the conflicts between himself" (M. Laporte) "and them materially hastened his death."* Nay, not satisfied with insisting that *la vieille garde* were resolved on war—not open war, which would have put them in the wrong with the public and popular opinion—but a guerilla warfare, which was to be carried on behind a screen of noble "lay figures," he has been guilty of attributing the rise and progress of the whole affair to Madame Grisi, the circumstances of whose private life, at this period of her career, he, with very questionable taste, has dragged into the conflict, as affording a reason why, "like another Helen," she "fired another Troy."† Much more likely to be accurate concerning the actual causes of the "Tamburini riot" is the statement of an impartial observer of the events of which Her Majesty's Theatre was the scene, that the cause chiefly resulted from M. Laporte's own unwise conduct—conduct which may be supposed to have been recommended by his legal adviser, inasmuch as, in after times, he took almost precisely the same line when he became a manager, and suffered in proportion to his folly. That M. Laporte could not fail to be called to account was impossible, if the following statement is to be taken as worth anything as between himself and the public: "A progressive encroachment on the purses of the subscribers —witness the raised rents of the boxes, and the fifteen nights

* Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, pp. 9-10.

† Ibid. p. 14.

retrenched from the subscription—and on the comfort of the casual public—witness the six rows of stalls subtracted from the pit (another measure tending to enrich the treasury)—has been accompanied by a constant disposition on M. Laporte's part to attempt such changes and economies as seriously impair the excellence of most operatic performances, as entirely preclude the possibility of others. In proof: besides the vexed question under note (the Tamburini riot), since the time—two years ago—when Ivanhoff was dismissed, the place of second tenor has been filled by persons such as Tati and Ricciardi, whose singing would disgrace a minor theatre. Again, last year (1839), Madame Albertazzi,* the established contralto of the company, was dispensed with; the engagement of Mdlle. Pauline Garcia† for a few nights as *prima donna* by no means filling the void, inasmuch as that lady naturally declined the secondary occupation falling to the share of the person missing. This year we have neither Albertazzi *nor* Pauline Garcia, and hence we can have no *Tancredi*, no *Semiramide*, no *Donna del Lago*—no opera, in short, with a prominent contralto part." ‡

Doubtless the pecuniary embarrassments which M. Laporte's management had occasioned were chiefly the cause of his attempting to diminish his expenditure by reducing his engagements to the utmost possible limits; but, as events speedily proved, the true road to economy would have been through a little more expenditure wisely laid out, and not by adhering to a notion—which his friend Mr. Lumley evidently fostered—that, being worried beyond all powers of endurance by the

* See above, p. 70. † See above, p. 83.

‡ See *Athenæum* for 1840, p. 354.

annoyances, the obstructions, and the insolence of "the cabal," he had at one time determined to get rid of the "blessed lot."*

It was fully anticipated that the "Tamburini riot" would have been repeated on the next opera night; but an event, which at one time had threatened to fill a volume, failed to be carried any farther. The "Tamburinists" were at their posts; the love of battle was swelling in their hearts; the storm had even begun to arise, when M. Laporte came forward and said that he had written a note to, or had received one from, Signor Tamburini, and that he hoped everything would be satisfactorily settled. No farther attempt at uproar was therefore made, and this terminated a scene, not previously rehearsed, which had rendered Thursday evening, April 30th, immortal.† For this desirable end, "the good offices of the Count D'Orsay"—then in the plenitude of his popularity as a leader of *ton*—were employed in mediation. The manager yielded to the pressure, and bowed before the storm, which he had been powerless to control. Tamburini was reengaged; "but so little value did the gentlemen of the 'omnibus' box attach to their triumph"—so says Mr. Lumley—"that on the first appearance of that singer, both that box and the stalls were without occupants, and remained so till the ballet"‡—the same *divertissement* which was to have been given on the memorable Thursday night.

* See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 13.

† See the *Times*, May 4, 1840.

‡ See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, pp. 16, 17. Whether this is to be taken as a correct statement I am unable to say, inasmuch as I was not present; but an eye witness assured me, that what is called an "ovation" was never more earnestly bestowed than when the famed baritone again appeared upon the stage of Her Majesty's Theatre.

May passed over without any remarkable circumstances, Rossini's *Otello* and *La Gazza Ladra* having been alternated up to the 14th, when, for Lablache's benefit, *Il Don Giovanni* was to have been given. At the last moment, however, both opera and benefit were postponed, and *Lucia di Lammermoor*, with Persiani as the heroine, and Coletti, who had not retired, as Enrico, was substituted. In the course of the evening Gnecco's *La Prova d'una Opera seria* was given, in which Lablache, as the manager, manifested his usual portly magnificence. Lablache's personation of this character, of which he was greatly enamoured, was one of the finest pieces of comic acting ever witnessed on any stage, his humour having been as rich as his manner was easy, and the whole so perfectly wrought as to be thoroughly natural. On this occasion, in distributing the music amongst the orchestra, he paid a compliment to Dragonetti and Lindley,* by dedicating one part *al patriarca del contrabasso*, and another *al patriarca del violoncello*. On Thursday, May 22nd, the disappointment which had been produced by the postponement of Mozart's *Don Giovanni* for Lablache's benefit was condoned by the revival of that great work, an event which caused the theatre to be crammed to suffocation. How strong the cast of that night was may be discerned when it is told that Tamburini was the Don; Lablache, Leporello; Rubini, Ottavio; Grisi, Donna Anna; Persiani, Zerlina; and Ernesta Grisi, Donna Elvira. Her Majesty, who was a pupil of the *bénéficiaire*, honoured him with her presence as a just tribute to the great merits of that first-rate *artiste* and excellent man. On the 28th of May this opera was followed by an excellent performance of the

* See vol. i. p. 202.

same composer's *Le Nozze di Figaro*, with the same cast, excepting that Rubini did not appear till after its conclusion, and then only in the closing scene of the last act of the *Lucia*, Ricciardi being considered good enough for the tenor music belonging to Mozart's second masterpiece."

During several weeks a great parade had been made of an approaching event that, if the *quidnuncs* were to be believed, was to take the town by storm—the production of an opera entitled *Inez di Castro*, by Signor Persiani, the husband of the celebrated *cantatrice* of the same name,* and written with a special design for showing off that lady's peculiar talent. Like many other things striven to be puffed into notoriety, this opera was a decided failure. It was indeed—as was most aptly written at the time†—"an opera with one duet, magnificently performed and agreeably composed, and with Lablache in the costume of a Spanish king, so filling the stage by his gorgeous presence as to give the mind, through the eye, a pleasure which there is little chance of its receiving through the ears from *il mæstro* Persiani's music. Such at best is *Inez di Castro*." "The force and passion of the well-known historical passage"—of Prince Pedro marrying his mistress Inez di Castro, and being reconciled to his father, after which a series of wholesale poisoning is carried out—"having, according to custom, been tamed out of the *libretto*, the latter was as weak and hackneyed as a musician would not desire, and but for the energetic acting of Lablache and, wonderful to add, of Rubini in the above-mentioned duet, the audience would have sepa-

* See above, p. 74. It was Signor Persiani, with Signor Galetti, who first opened the Royal Italian Opera, Covent Garden, with the late Mr. Frederick Beale as manager.

† See *Athenæum* for 1840, p. 461.

rated as unmoved as if a lecture had been read, instead of a tragedy represented. As regards the composition, from the first bars of the overture to the 'dying fall' of the *prima donna's* mad scene, not all the admirable singing of Persiani and Rubini—who, indeed, outdid themselves in delicacy, finish, and brilliancy to the audacious point, the former touching E flat *altissimo*, the latter a high soprano note, which could hardly be named lest the ear might have been deceived—could hide the truth, that the work was utterly barren, poor, and commonplace, so much so that one could even think wistfully of Donizetti whilst suffering under the weariness of such an infliction."*

One of the musical events that never can be forgotten in an *habitué's* life was the first appearance of Lablache on the 9th June as Dr. Bartolo, a part for which he was advertised as "condescending to accept," and which he raised into a greatness Rossini never anticipated for it when he wrote his sparkling *Barbiere*. The cast of this performance was of the richest character, Persiani being Rosina; Rubini, Almaviva; Tamburini, Figaro; and Morelli, Basilio. Lablache on this occasion did not take those liberties which he afterwards introduced with such questionable taste, interlarding the text with scraps of bad English, vulgarly but technically called "gag," such as "How *weel* he looks!" when seeing Basilio on his first appearance on the scene, and in the second act taking up the spinet bodily in his arms, and carrying it down to the footlights. Rather did he on this occasion play the part with good taste and sound discretion, which he would have done well to have retained. But, after all, he was so great even in his absurdities, as in every other part he ever undertook, that he might

* See *Athenæum* for 1840, p. 461.

easily be forgiven for a piece of folly, to be more generally attributed to his audience than to himself. "Familiarity" induced him to take such liberties; but never can it be said that such "familiarity bred contempt," so far as the grand old Neapolitan *basso profundo*, the Bartolo of "Batolos," was concerned.

On the 11th of June, Bellini's *Il Pirata* was resuscitated for Rubini's benefit; but in spite of the work being one of that composer's least mannered compositions, it failed to make any greater impression than it had already realised, and that was little better than weakness personified. The great tenor was not in his accustomed force, and it was but too apparent that the wear and tear of a very severe season were more than his wearied organ had been well able to bear. His method and taste were, however, as perfect as ever, and these in themselves were features that gave a charm to his efforts which have never been since his time either rivalled or surpassed. The opera, however, was by no means well chosen for such an occasion, inasmuch as it could but display, beyond the possibility of contradiction or mistake, that his voice was so impaired as never to be likely to recover its wonted qualities.

But very little more is to be said about the operatic season of this year. Mario did not return till very nearly its close, and then made no greater impression than he had effected in the previous year. His powers were still in abeyance, and he took no pains whatever, either to study or to perfect the splendid gifts with which nature had endowed him. At this period of his career it must be said that he possessed *vox, et præterea nihil*, by which alone he seemed to be prepared to shape his course. In spite of his natural resources, he relied upon nothing else than his handsome face, and his ability to

sing such detached *cavatinas* of Bellini and Donizetti as had got hold of the "ears of the groundlings." Of acting, he appeared not to have the slightest idea. To all intents and purposes he was, at this period of his career, nothing better than Ivanhoff was when he began, and as he continued to be to the end of his engagements in this country. Mario's greatest admirers expected nothing more of him than that he might become a makeshift for Rubini, whenever that *artiste* retired into private life.

The season closed, far more brilliantly than had been anticipated, at the end of the month of June, with the revival of Cimarosa's always welcome *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, as imperishable a work as ever was written. Truly indeed has it been said of this immortal work, that there is "no other opera extant in which merely half a dozen characters, unassisted by chorus, and unframed by scenic pomp, can so fill the stage, as to keep an audience alive for a whole evening. . . . To analyse this charming conversation piece would surely be superfluous. Who is there who knows not by heart 'Un matrimonio nobile,' and 'Lei faccio'? and yet who is weary of them? That Lablache's Don Geronimo was the very first of his comic performances who can doubt? The touch of dismay, wounded affection, and childish distress he threw into the last scene was all but miraculous, when the diverting and ridiculous associations his presence could but excite were taken into account. There was, indeed, never anything like it upon the stage. Madame Grisi could also only have been praised for her capital comedy in the secondary part of Lisetta; Rubini remonstrated with for the super-sweet warblings and *fioramenti* with which he retarded the close of 'Pria chi spunti;' Mdlle. Tosi admired in Fidalma only on the score of her hoop

and powdered head—the only things which paired off with Lablache's deaf periwig and ample waistcoat, no more resembling the power, the fun, and the inimitable wit of Malibran, than the chimpanzee of the Zoological Gardens is like the most perfect model of a man that can be induced to go and look upon that strange freak, or rather abortion, of nature. So far, however, as nature and study had rendered Mdlle. Tosi capable of undertaking this character, she was perhaps about the best executant that has ever attempted a part which Malibran had immortalised, since that versatile and lamented *artiste's* premature death."*

To M. Laporte the close of the season of 1840 must have been an immense relief. Not only had he encountered the most formidable "riot" that had ever been witnessed within the walls of Her Majesty's Theatre, and "tided over" it, but he had escaped from financial difficulties, the first appearance of which must have seemed to have been all but overwhelming.

The complicated state of the affairs of Her Majesty's Theatre was indeed so immense, that it seemed to be utterly impossible for any one that touched them to escape being overwhelmed in a vortex of immediate misfortune and inevitable ruin. "The assignees of Mr. Chambers, who appeared in the character of lessors of the opera-house, had been for years past unable to come to any decisive settlement as to the property. His bankruptcy had become a case famous in legal annals, not only from the apparently endless litigation it had occasioned, and the knotty points of law and even fact involved, but from the peculiar position of Mr. Chambers himself, who had resolutely chosen to remain a prisoner in the Fleet, rather

* See *Athenæum* for 1840, p. 578.

than recognise the legality of his bankruptcy—a matter obstinately disputed and fought in various courts, with fresh evidence in proof or in refutation at every turn, and with fluctuating results. During all this period the assignees had abstained from any sale of the property, which an adverse decision would have rendered null, at the same time that it would have entailed very serious consequences upon themselves. Eventually, however, between the years 1839—40, an arrangement had been made between the conflicting parties, and the assignees judged themselves enabled to offer the theatre for sale. Fears were naturally entertained by M. Laporte that the theatre might fall into the hands of persons adverse to his interests; and he strongly solicited his newly-found friend and legal adviser, Mr. Lumley, to find the means of purchasing the property, with the understanding that he should be granted a fresh lease under the new proprietary for a certain number of years at a fixed rental. And in the year 1840—the last but one of the Laporte management—negotiations to this effect took a substantial form, inasmuch as instructions had already been made for the preparation of a provisional contract to serve until the title could be investigated, and the purchase completed. Such, then, was the state of the property* at the close of the eventful season of 1840.

The concert season of this year (1840) was by no means brilliant, although it was characterised by one or two events which ought not to be passed over in silence. At the third Philharmonic Society's Concert, Spohr's "Historical Symphony" was given, for the first time in London, and Herr Mclique, who soon after became an established *virtuoso* in London.

* See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, pp. 19, 20.

made his first appearance as a violinist of very high rank. About this newest specimen of the great German's imagination the musical doctors differed widely, according to their wont; the critic of the *Athenæum*, with his usual asperity, in which he indulged to the very last days of his life, "damning it with faint praise;" whilst Professor Edward Taylor, and those who agreed with him, were vehement in their commendation as to its being the best specimen of Symphonic creation that had yet proceeded from their highly esteemed friend's hand. So far as my own judgment is concerned, I was disposed to look less favourably upon this than upon preceding specimens of Spohr's power, since it was found to be not only more discursive in the treatment of its several subjects, but more filled with those mannerisms which he had of late introduced in greater profusion than in any of his previous inspirations. About the talent of Herr Molique there was no diversity of opinion. He was, as he deserved to be, accepted at once as a genuine violinist, unequal undoubtedly to Paganini, but quite upon a par with De Beriot and Ole Bull, and far in advance of Vieuxtemps, or Artot, or any other player that had of late sought for the approbation of the British public. This Stuttgart *artiste** had evidently come to his future home in the full vigour of his powers, and determined to make for himself the position he afterwards achieved. It was truly said of his playing that it was "firm in tone, exquisite in the management of his time—the largest sweeps and *arpeggi* being brought within the compass of the bar with a triumphant coolness; deep in his expression, without the over-intensity of affecta-

* He died in Germany, after a long illness, attended with loss of reason, two or three years ago.

tion; *naïf* and pointed when his quaint *finale* required it, without an atom of false grotesque or caricature."* Herr Molique's concerto, which was his own composition, also made a great impression, inasmuch as it showed the mind of a competent theorist, as his hand proved the power of a finished player. This concert was one of unusual brilliancy, inasmuch as not only did the novelties of Spohr and Molique form a leading feature, but Beethoven's symphony in F, Mendelssohn's overture to the *Isles of Fingal*, and Weber's "Concert-Stück," admirably played by Moscheles, were also included in the programme. The vocalists at this concert were Miss Birch and Miss M. B. Hawes, the conductor being Sir George Smart, and the leader Mr. T. Cook. At the fourth Philharmonic Society's Concert, under the direction of Mr. Cipriani Potter, Herr Molique again appeared, and by playing another concerto, greatly improved the impression his previous performance had made. As a work, that "concerto was less liked than the one selected for the former concert; but his powers of firm execution, delicious and easy expression, and quaint sprightliness, increased upon his hearers with acquaintance, and justified to the fullest the sound and sterling popularity he had already acquired."† At the fifth concert of this Society, Herr Liszt appeared, and Herr Molique played a fantasia upon themes from Bellini's *Norma;* but as I was not there to hear, I must pass over this concert, and hasten to the next, when the same pianist played Beethoven's Kreutzer Sonata with Ole Bull. Liszt's talent it is impossible to deny; yet he was one of those players, even in the zenith of his fame, with whom it was absolutely impossible to be entirely

* See *Athenæum* for 1840, p. 400. † Id. p. 355.

satisfied, chiefly because of his uncertainty. When in the mood, nothing could be more nobly expressive or more free from caricature than his playing; but at other times, and far too often, he was both capricious and wearisome. His mechanism was the most extraordinary that ever human hand was capable of accomplishing. He would pile up difficulties upon difficulties to such a height, that it seemed to be next to impossible that anything more intricate could be devised; and yet to these something so startling would be added, that it was wholly out of the question to conceive to what extent he would carry them. I must admit to have become soon wearied with such demonstrations of dash and intricacy; but, whenever he could be induced to be reasonable, as he was on the occasion of his playing the Kreutzer Sonata with Ole Bull, there was a charm about his method that few indeed could ever touch. This was the only occasion on which I was perfectly satisfied with him, or on which I could form the sure conclusion that greatness really attached to him. If a judgment had only been arrived at by means of his extravagances, I should have pronounced him offhand to have been the most detestable charlatan to whom I had ever had the misfortune to listen; but this one event prevented the formation of such an opinion, and convinced me that he had every qualification that a great master could possess, but that his mind was so unevenly balanced, that no reliance could ever be placed upon his doing justice, either to his art or to himself. Ole Bull, by his performance with Liszt, "did much to remove among the audience an idea warranted by his former constancy to music of the loosest possible structure, viz., that he was incapable of rendering worthily the works of the greatest masters. But

although the performance of his part was striking and passionate, becoming more nervous and masterly as the duet proceeded, it was still occasionally marked by uncertainties and exaggerations—the latter conventional, rather than spontaneous—which marred its effect. These, however, were so transient, as not to diminish the gratification which so remarkable a performance was calculated to produce."* All, however, that this violinist had done at the seventh Philharmonic Society's Concert, he undid at the eighth and last, "when he played one of his violin fantasias, which, regarded as music, had no business in the programme of a classical concert."†

At the Birmingham Festival in the autumn of this year, Mendelssohn's "Lobgesang," or Hymn of Praise, as conducted by himself, was the chief novelty. As coinciding with my own opinion of this great and impressive work, which had been written for the Gutenberg Festival at Leipsic in the previous year, I cannot do better than quote the following criticism: "Such a Hymn of Praise ought to be an outpouring of thanksgiving, which, acknowledging a blessing vouchsafed, is cheerful, but not proud, thus distinct from triumph glorying over an achieved conquest. And this, if impression answer intention, and we have at all comprehended his purpose, Mendelssohn has fully accomplished. There is joy with understanding everywhere evident in the brighter portions of his works, while even in the glances thrown upon distress and deep affliction gone by—such acknowledgment being indispensable to gratitude's full exercise—the presence of hope and comfort is manifest. The sorrow is not felt to be careless, the shadow of death not displayed as a pall of final sepulture, but as a veil

* See *Athenæum* for 1840, p. 482. † Id. p. 518.

which the Highest has decreed *shall* pass. This general idea has been wrought out by the musician with the happiest skill. From the first bold and exulting phrase of the Symphonic portion of the work, to the last chord of the final fugue, where all the intertwined vocal and instrumental parts return to the same grand and final unison, the prevailing spirit is illustrated with a delightful variety of resource. Witness in the second instrumental movement the major chords of the wind instruments introduced to relieve the minor strain; witness that exquisite duet with its supporting chorus, 'I waited for the Lord;' the subsequent chorus in D major, 'The night is departing;' and the *corale* at first harmonised in four parts, and then given in unison by the entire mass of voices, the orchestra maintaining, on its repetition, a rich but not distracting accompaniment. More closely to analyse this Hymn would require more space than we can command, even were it possible to do so on the strength of a single hearing. We must return, however, for one moment, to specify the duet for the two *soprani* already mentioned, as one of the most legitimately engaging movements which modern art has produced; nor can the whole work be left without repeating that, whether as regards poetry of conception or skill of execution, it is worthy of the composer of the conversion scene in *St. Paul*."*

Another remarkable feature of this year's Birmingham Festival was Mendelssohn's organ performances, which held the audiences who had the privilege of listening to them entranced. The vocal part of the several performances was scarcely equal to that of previous years. Amongst the English singers Miss Hawes and Braham bore away the palm, the former by her

* See *Athenæum* for 1840, p. 757.

distinct articulation and breadth of method, in spite of a slight tendency to exaggeration for the sake of effect; the latter for making the voice that once was forgotten in the passionate and expressive declamation that was still retained. With the Birmingham Festival of 1840 the musical events of that year may be said to have terminated, and that these were neither small nor trivial will be, to all intents and purposes, apparent.

Unwarned by the unpopularity his conduct had occasioned during the season of 1840, M. Laporte showed little or no disposition to meet the wishes of his subscribers and the public for the opening campaign of 1841. Not only did he, for the commencement of the season, promise a new singer, Mdlle. Löwe, whom he wished to put forward as a second Sontag, but he encroached still further upon the convenience of his audience, by adding two or three more rows of stalls to those which he had already curtailed from the pit; "making that once favourite resort of rank and fashion, about the best imaginable theatre for the exhibition of experiments in the compressibility of human matter."* Since her appearance in 1839, Pauline Garcia had become Madame Viardot-Garcia, she having married M. Viardot, the *impresario* of the Grand Opera at Paris for one season, but who retired from that position upon the ground of not being able consistently to perform its duties, with his wife in the position of a *prima donna*—an influence which did that gentleman the utmost credit, and by which very few would have permitted themselves to have been guided. Madame Viardot, as I shall henceforth call her, made her *rentrée* on the first night of the season, Thursday, March 4th, in Cimarosa's *Gli Orazi*, a glorious but now almost

* See *Athenæum* for 1841, p. 213.

wholly forgotten work, but failed to increase the impression which she had made in the *Otello* and *Cenerentola*;* inasmuch as her admirable musical skill, and her fine dramatic conception of the dignity, the tenderness, and the agonised despair of the part, were not assisted by nature, her voice being still weak and unsympathetic. She was seconded by Mario, to whom she imparted the first lessons of dramatic power, by means of which he, a few years afterwards, became as clever an actor as he was a charming singer. Unfortunately the influence of Grisi had greater weight with him than any other of his contemporaries could exercise, the consequence of which was that what he had learned from Madame Viardot he speedily forgot, especially as his new companion, being but a mere copyist herself, had neither the talent nor the intelligence to impart any instruction, even to herself. A Miss Nunn made her appearance on this occasion, but her personation of the part of Curatio was nothing more than respectable. On the 20th, Mario having been recalled to Paris on account of the indisposition of Rubini, Rossini's *Tancredi* was revived, Madame Viardot personating the hero, and Persiani the heroine. In this opera the singing of the former lady was greatly improved, whilst her acting was forcible and energetic, as well as firm and decisive. Madame Persiani did not seem, however, to be at all at home in her part, and as she had made up her mind, simply out of caprice, to be jealous of her companion, she neither did the opera, herself, nor the audience justice. A Spanish tenor, a M. Puig,† who débuted under the

* See above, pp. 83-4.

† This *artiste*, the son of a Spanish general, curiously enough, was the unfortunate Elvira to the Amina of Madame Viardot, when she sang in the *Sonnambula* at Covent Garden, in 1849

assumed name of Signor Flavio, attempted the part of Argerio, but displayed few qualities that entitled him to take the position into which he was thrust. Tamburini not having arrived, the part of Orbassano was assumed by Signor Rhigini, who merely walked through it, without evincing any vocal powers to justify his engagement, even before Easter, when, it may be remembered, M. Laporte had told his audience it was not possible to meet with competent *artistes*.* Suspicions began to be aroused that an attempt would be again made to do without the greater Italian baritone, which, however, were not realised. Shortly after this event—the revival of *Tancredi*—Bellini's unsatisfactory *Beatrice di Tenda* was "put up" for a Signora Granchi and a Signor de Bassini. Without being first rates, each of these new-comers proved that they might be made useful adjuncts to the more weighty *la vieille garde*, upon whom, in spite of his suspicions of their determination to "cabal," M. Laporte had entirely to trust for anything like prosperous results during and at the close of the season.

On May 6th one of, if not actually the richest treats of this season, was afforded by the presentation of Cimarosa's *Il Matrimonio Segreto*, with Madame Viardot in her accomplished sister's memorable character of Fidalma. Those who remembered Malibran's "make up" for that character were startled by the appearance of the sister upon her entrance upon the scene, and not a few of the oldest *habitués* exclaimed, loudly enough to be heard almost everywhere throughout the house, "Why, what does this mean? It cannot be Malibran." Unhappily that could never be again; but next to that gifted woman herself, her sister approached the nearest; and although by no means presenting a copy of Malibran's version,

* See above, p. 90.

but introducing numerous clever touches of her own, she made it impossible that any other *artiste* who has since attempted to try her strength in this direction could ever be as triumphantly successful. Madame Viardot had the good fortune to be supported by such a cast as had never been witnessed, and never can be again witnessed, in modern times; for not only did Lablache revel in his favourite character of the deaf father, Geronimo, but Rubini played that of Paolo; Tamburini the Conte Robinson; and Persiani and Grisi were Carolina and Lisette—a galaxy of the brightest talent that could be gathered together. Many people are wont nowadays to rave about the cleverness that may be witnessed at the modern Royal Italian Opera, and to speak of the triumphs of Her Majesty's Opera in the most ecstatic terms; but, admirable as the performances of the latter theatre are, and creditable as those of the former may now occasionally be, when the modern "stars" appear in a cluster, as they sometimes do, such people can have no cognisance of what the palmiest days of Italian opera in this country were, else they would not be contented with the wretchedly deficient *ensembles* that are continually presented to them as the most perfect demonstrations of the art that can be realised. Not only in London, but nowhere else in the whole continent of Europe, could such a cast for Cimarosa's inimitable opera be now brought together. Here and there one or two *artistes* may be found—although, it must be confessed, they are never met with—who might give tolerable satisfaction in one or other of the six characters upon which the performance of *Il Matrimonio Segreto* alone relies; but where and when will *six* such names as those already mentioned be conjoined? They do not any more exist; and before them even the Linds, the

Pattis, the Luccas, the Carvalhos, the Albanis, *et hoc genus omne*, must hide their diminished heads. It is often said that if the Kemble family could return to the stage, those few who remain to laud their talent, and to expostulate against anything of modern origin being brought into comparison with them, would, quite as much as their numerous juniors, admit that the school was stilted, formal, and unnatural. It may be that it would be found to be so; but to draw the same conclusion concerning such *artistes* as Grisi, Malibran, Persiani, Viardot amongst women, and Rubini, Tamburini, Mario, and Lablache amongst men, would be impossible. None are left to take their place, which at present remains utterly "void," although not altogether "desolate." Thirty years ago the opera relied solely for its excellence upon vocal and histrionic talent of the highest class. Then the band and chorus were taken to be of comparatively secondary moment, however competent the respective members of each department were for their several duties. Now the success of operatic arrangements depends almost wholly upon those important departments, combined with an extravagant and not unfrequently exaggerated *mise en scène*, whilst such "stars" as we have shine with a much less brilliant light, and would speedily, without the aid of modern appliances, fade into utter dimness. We must, forsooth, be content with such operatic "mercies" as remain; but unhappily they are as pitiable as they are miserably "small."

On Thursday, May the 13th, on the occasion of Tamburini's benefit, Mdlle. Löwe, who has been already mentioned,* made

* See above. p. 109. Jeanne-Sophie Löwe was the youngest daughter of Frederick-Augustus Leopold Löwe, a musician of some eminence, and was born at Oldenburg in 1815. She received her primary musical education

her *début* in Bellini's *La Straniera*, one of the weakest compositions in existence, but so far suitable to a *débutante*, that the interest rests entirely upon the heroine, and that there is considerable opportunity for histrionic display. This lady had come from Berlin, where she had for some time enjoyed the highest fame, and quitted a brilliant position to conquer the public of Paris and London, in which she was by no means successful, either in the one capital or the other. Mdlle. Löwe's voice, although of a thin and wiry quality, was endurable so long as she exerted no unusual force to fill Her Majesty's Theatre; but the middle tones were so feeble that they required what is vulgarly termed "pumping," when the need for their development was apparent. The precision and force which she employed in the use of her higher register sometimes surprised, but very rarely gratified, her hearers. She laboured also under the greatest of all defects—that of continually singing false, for which her accentuation, which was clear, pointed, and generally satisfactory, could not compensate. As a proof of her vocal ability, she used the shake at the topmost notes of the scale with a certainty and an effect which it must have cost her the most arduous and unremitting practice to have acquired. But this feat, clever and painstaking as it was, was not enough to constitute her the second

at Mannheim, afterwards at Frankfort, and then at Vienna At the latter capital, on account of her success at a concert, she was engaged at the Körnthnerthor Opera-house. Thence in 1837 she went to Berlin, and afterwards appeared in the chief opera-houses of Germany. Between 1841 and 1843 she sang in Paris and London, and then went to Milan, and afterwards to the other principal Italian cities, where, on account of the beauty of her voice and her dramatic intelligence, she met with a most favourable reception. Since 1848 she has not been heard of. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. v. p. 340.

Sontag M. Laporte had been unwise enough to designate her. As an actress, she was entitled to a high position; several of those bursts of passion, upon which the part she played relies for histrionic less than for vocal effect, being frequently highly to be commended. Her person was commanding; her face handsome; her action, on the whole, good, although at times marred by that anxious excess of posture-making, which it is still, as it was thirty years ago, the tendency of the German theatrical studies to encourage. Mario, who played the part of Arturo, manifested a considerable advance, his singing showing that he was rapidly gaining finish, while force was never for an instant absent. Tamburini, moreover, as Valdeburgh, also sung with uncommon power, and acted with all the solemnity belonging to the character, which he had been at the utmost pains to make essentially his own.

After appearing once more in *La Straniera*, Mdlle. Löwe, on the 20th of May, undertook the part of *terza donna*—Donna Elvira—in *Il Don Giovanni*, Grisi and Persiani assuming the two superior, but not more important, characters of Donna Anna and Zerlina. This infusion of the German element into the concerted pieces of Mozart's grandest opera—which had hitherto suffered most grievously and unwarrantably from the difficult *rôle* of Donna Elvira being invariably the worst treated—was not only of immense advantage to the work as a whole, but was most assuredly the prelude to these better days, in which the most incompetent third-rate lady in the theatre is no longer thrust before the audience. Time has since been when Mesdames Viardot and Bosio have appeared in that part; but as that will have to be referred to when the respective periods of those ladies' careers have

to be considered, nothing more need now be said upon the subject.

The 29th of May witnessed the production of a novelty—the *Fausta* of Donizetti, which in spite of the combined talent of Grisi, Mario, and Tamburini, failed to be anything else than *infaust*, although it can be by no means added, *horresco referens*. Nothing but Grisi's determination saved this musical melodrama from being hopelessly condemned off hand; and, if any success at all were possibly accorded, it was the Diva's altogether and entirely, for Donizetti had nothing whatever to do with the matter. A more thorough specimen of fluent mediocrity perhaps was never inflicted upon any audience. The management soon discovered it to be expedient to withdraw this unlucky venture, and substituted for it the *Elisir d'Amore* of the same composer—a much more creditable work of art—and *Il Don Giovanni*, which never could be heard too often. On the 12th of June, however, an event occurred that ought by no means to be passed over *sub silentio*—Madame Viardot's association for the first time with Grisi and Tamburini as Arsace in Rossini's *Semiramide*. Musically, this left nothing to be desired; for the young aspirant's reading, both of the part and of the music, was original, whilst her action was easy and unembarrassed. At that time, however, Madame Viardot's voice was in a degree deficient in power; but although unable, because of the somewhat niggardly gifts of nature, to execute all that was demanded of her with the force the character required, she yet went through it with a delicacy intrinsically charming, in spite of its being deprived, in some measure, of its masculine details. Nothing, however, could be more exquisite than her passages *à due* with Grisi, who condescended to

sing with a less patronising manner than she was in the habit of manifesting towards a younger *artiste*, who was, in future years, to become the most formidable rival, not excepting Jenny Lind, she ever had to encounter. On the following Tuesday, the *Semiramide* was repeated, when Madame Viardot, having gained greater confidence, sang with considerable increase of energy.

In order to prove to the *habitués* rather than to the general public, that the season should not be condemned for want of novelty, M. Laporte brought out on Thursday, June 24th, Donizetti's last new opera, *Roberto Devereux*, one of the weakest specimens that *maestro* had yet written. Although this opera was repeated on the following Tuesday, and Grisi, as Elizabeth, made every effort to save it from condemnation—in which she was aided by Tamburini as the Earl of Nottingham, and Rubini in the title *rôle*—it fell completely flat, and was speedily withdrawn from the bills. It had been announced for Grisi's benefit, but whether that somewhat capricious lady experienced doubts at the last moment concerning its success, that part of the *affiche* was withdrawn, and Donizetti was presented in his newest form without the accompaniment that was certain to fill the theatre from floor to ceiling. As to the *libretto* of this weak specimen of hasty competition, it was as bold as could well be conceived, the absurdities of its anachronisms being such that it was impossible either to overlook or laugh at them. They were too absurd to be for an instant tolerated, being "past counting up or quarrelling with. Grisi's costumes—the opera in this respect was mounted regardless of expense—were most becomingly gorgeous; Rubini's soprano G in falsetto threw the house into ecstasies, in which no lover of the

art could share; and these were all the features that could be enumerated in this new confection, called, *par exemple*, a tragic drama."*

Roberto Devereux having failed, the *Lucrezia Borgia* was resumed; but the first warning of the close of the season was heard in the "Non più mesta" of Rossini's *La Cenerentola*, at the beginning of July, with which Madame Viardot concluded her engagement, and presented a most exquisitely finished performance of the heroine's character, in which brilliancy, delicacy, originality of ornament, taste, and pathos, were all combined in her singing. "In fact," as it was truly observed at the time, "to the entire effect of the opera—so whimsical was Lablache, so dashingly vulgar Tamburini, so honeyed and highly finished Rubini—there wanted but two things; first, a pair of tolerable *soprani* for the parts of Clorinda and Tisbe,"† and a less evident manifestation of the dramatic effect of the singing being sacrificed to the peculiarities of certain voices. For instance, Rubini in several points only whispered and warbled, and made no effort whatever to personate the character in which he appeared; whilst Tamburini was "barking" more loudly than usual—a propensity that was becoming more and more apparent in everything he now undertook to sing. Lablache alone resisted such mannerisms, and refrained from the exhibition of that buffoonery towards which he had already begun to show an inexcusable propensity—the fault chiefly of his audiences, who, had they not roared at his absurdities, would have restrained him from deviating from that true greatness and grandeur he could

* See *Athenæum* for 1841, p. 520.

† Ibid. p. 526.

evince beyond the powers of any of his immediate associates. After this event the *Barbiere* was revived, with Grisi (Rosina), and Mario (Almaviva). The former was pronounced to be unquestionably the best Rosina that had ever been seen—an opinion by no means to be indorsed, since, although her manner was arch and sprightly enough, there was a tinge of vulgarity about her personation that was entirely opposed to the character of Beaumarchais's wayward, but on noconsid eration whatever ill-bred, Spanish gentlewoman. The music, written for a contralto, was likewise out of her register, necessitating many transpositions, which detracted from the effect, no less than from Rossini's intentions. It was a part which this remarkable woman took up more out of caprice than on account of any liking for it, and one which, being unsuited to her, she speedily laid aside. Mario certainly looked, as he always did to the very last, the handsomest of Almivivas, and his bearing was so polished and noble, that the contrast between himself and Grisi could but be the more remarked. He had at this period of his career by no means perfected his representation of a character that was always a manifest favourite with him; but the germs of the future excellence with which he clothed it were so apparent, that no doubt of his becoming unexceptionably perfect could be entertained. The "blue blood" that was in his veins was never more apparent than when he played this character, although, with respect to mind or intelligence, he was amongst the weakest *artistes* that ever have obtained celebrity. Afterwards a most unworthy presentation of Rossini's *Il Turco in Italia*, by way of revival, was all but cut to pieces; but in by no means the same manner was Rossini's *Marino Faliero* immediately

afterwards produced, in which the grandeur of Lablache, the peculiar powers of Rubini, and the warbling of Mario—although Ivanhoff by many was preferred to him—were abundantly apparent. The part of Dogaressa was assumed by Mdlle. Löwe,* and passionately acted, rendering her more successful than she had hitherto been in London, yet by no means sufficiently so as to warrant the report which began to be widely circulated, that M. Laporte intended to dispense with the services of Grisi, and to substitute this German lady in the season of 1842. The fact had somehow or other got wind—a fact which Mr. Lumley has confirmed †—that "as early as 1840, M. Laporte had resolved upon making a beginning towards breaking up" that compact body of *artistes*, whom he designated as "a blessed lot," and "foiling their schemes,"—which he looked upon in the light of an anti-managerial clique,—"by the non-engagement of one of their number." Great discontent was manifested when this report got into circulation; but as nothing positive was known, no demonstration was publicly made against its being verified in 1842. It, however, served to widen the breach between M. Laporte and the leading *artistes* of his company, and prognosticated no agreeable circumstances in the future.

In spite of so many drawbacks, the season was now drawing towards a truly brilliant end, although such an event was only to be realised by the retirement of Rubini, which nominally took place on August the 21st, when a fragmentary programme was selected as the means for a partial leave-taking, as the event proved to be, consisting of those portions of the

* See above, pp. 109, 113.

† See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 17.

Marino Faliero, the *Lucia di Lammermoor,* and the *Sonnambula,* in all of which that distinguished *artiste* had hitherto been wont to fill the prominent tenor parts. Worn as Rubini's organ had become, he retired under the manifestation of the utmost regret, and not indeed without hope on the one hand, and expectation on the other, that he might, like so many of his predecessors, find

> "parting such sweet sorrow,
> That he would say good-night till it were morrow."

Notwithstanding that it was said that these were "farewell" performances, Rubini was tempted to return to the scene of his former numerous triumphs in the next year, after which he gracefully betook himself into private life, and refrained henceforth from seeking to manifest that "there is a time in the affairs" of musicians, as "of men," however extensively it has "led on to fortune," in which it is the act of prudence, as of wisdom, to mean "farewell" when that word is spoken. With many defects in his method, and with but the fewest proofs that he ever touched the intellectual portion of his art, Rubini must always be remembered as the most accomplished vocalist of his time. "It was, perhaps, the very perfection to which he had brought the delivery of his voice, the finish of his slightest ornaments, and the sport with difficulties utterly beyond the reach of most singers, which tempted him to enervate his style; and although the younger generation of tenors, who may have aspired to succeed him, would have done well to have cast out of account the general carelessness and hurried monotony of his recitatives, his determination to produce an effect by perpetual displays of the curiosities of vocalism, no

matter how inappropriate to time and situation, they might, with profit as well as safety, have looked back to his method of execution as something rare, perfect, and worthy of all imitation."*

In spite of its many annoyances, the operatic season of 1841 had been by many degrees the most brilliant that M. Laporte had ever carried through. It was, however, to be his last. "Although conscious from time to time that his strength was failing him, in mind as well as body, he seems, during his last season, to have rallied occasionally, and to have manifested some of his ancient energy, vivacity, and spirit. In 1841 he prepared matters for the campaign of 1842, discussing programmes and forming engagements; and he appeared to have even contemplated undertaking the direction of the Italian Opera in Paris, conjointly with that of London. . . . Thoroughly worn out with the jarring conflict of his administration, M. Laporte retired, as soon as the season closed, to seek some repose to his overstrained mind, to a house he possessed on the banks of the Seine, near Corbeil." He and Mr. Lumley "parted on the understanding that they were to spend a week together in the autumn at that place." It was fated that they should never meet again; for on the latter arriving at Strasburg, *en route* for Switzerland and Italy, in the first letter of a mass of correspondence awaiting him, the sad intelligence of the death of his friend reached him. M. Laporte had died of disease of the heart, aggravated, probably, as Mr. Lumley supposes, "by the trials and emotions under which he had for so long a time suffered."†

Not being in London at the beginning of March in this

* See *Athenæum* for 1841, p. 644.

† See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, pp. 18-20.

year (1841), I escaped being a witness of a somewhat extreme proceeding at the second Philharmonic Concert, when the classicists hissed M. Berlioz's* overture to his opera, *Benvenuto Cellini*. Such a reception of a work in which considerable cleverness, if nothing more, was apparent, was justly pronounced to have been "an extreme proceeding."† It had its effect, however, upon a sensitive mind, and prevented—not a few will think advantageously—a repetition of that, or the presentation of any other, work by the same hand for some time to come. At the third concert of the same Society, a M. Wolf was permitted to play a violin concerto, that gentleman being scarcely better treated than M. Berlioz had been on the previous occasion. At the fourth concert, M. Vieuxtemps, who, in 1834, "had been performing in London as a very clever boy, played a concerto, and exhibited a thoroughly legitimate tone, utterly clear of that mannered tremulousness which for a long period after Paganini's appearance was thought to be indispensable." His execution was most truly pronounced to be "brilliant and of the grandest possible school, and clear of the slightest trickery, so admirably under control that the impression of effort whilst he was playing, or of fatigue after he had played, could not be felt for a passing second, however stupendous might be the passage, however Alexandrine the composition.‡ This is commendation of the highest flight, most undoubtedly; but, so far as M. Vieuxtemps's execution was then—or even now is—concerned, it is by no means too lofty; yet there

* As several details will have hereafter to be recorded concerning this very remarkable man and musician, any farther allusion than what is given above is for the present premature.

† See *Athenæum* for 1841, p. 229.

‡ Id. p. 325.

was then one fault in this celebrated violinist's playing which he has never overcome—a thinness of tone which is by no means agreeable to a highly sensitively attuned ear. In spite, however, of such a defect, M. Vieuxtemps, from that appearance to the present time, has stood at the head of such European violinists as have had occasion to compete with him.

At the sixth concert of this Society, Herr David* played a new and very brilliant violin concerto with considerable success, his style being marked by a truth and expression which at one pronounced him to be a master of his instrument. His execution was perhaps more solid than brilliant, but, unlike many of his contemporaries, he avoided all attempts to gain popularity by resorting to tricks that had no other than a spurious *ad captandum* purpose. A fantasia for the clarionet was played on this occasion by a M. Blaes, but the composition was poor, and his tone neither of first-rate quality nor strictly in tune; besides which it manifested the worst feature of the instrument when in incompetent hands—a reediness that is as disagreeable as it is unartistic. Mdlle. Meerti undertook Mozart's "Non più di fiori," and gave fair promise of future usefulness, the strength of her voice being of mezzo-soprano quality, somewhat marred by a tendency to that bane amongst modern vocalists—an effort to get expression out of an unnatural tremulousness, which may always indeed be spoken of as "an attempt, but not the deed." This lady, although she deservedly claimed consideration, failed to make any lasting impression upon an English public, who were becoming somewhat *blasé*, because of the super-excellence of those *artistes* who held the town against

* Brother of Madame Dulcken, and first violin of the Leipzig "Gewandhaus" Concerts.

all the world. At the eighth and last concert, Liszt* once more appeared; but as I failed to hear him, I must content myself with the remarks of one well able to give a reliable decision, who thus reported of his playing:

"The classicists again must have had a convincing proof of the soundness of his (Liszt's) attainments, by his amazing performance of Hummel's Septuor.† This was played from memory—an effort prodigious enough, with any one else, to have absorbed all that animation, and force, and brilliancy, which must belong to the moment's enthusiasm, or they become formal and fatiguing. Yet, so far from this being the case, the *artiste* was never more at his ease in the most whimsical drollery thrown off on the spur of the moment, than when infusing a new vigour of life and vividness of character into Hummel's fine solid composition; and enough cannot be said of his performance, without praise trenching upon the bounds of extravagance."‡ I have never ceased to regret that I missed the only opportunity ever afforded me of hearing that extraordinary man's interpretation of a composition of which I still retain such vivid "Recollections" of its writer's manner. It was not to be; and, to all intents and purposes, as the foregoing details show, I had had enough of musical dissipation during the season of 1841 to have rendered the loss I deplore excusable; for, independently of those "events," of which the present chapter treats, there were hosts of other concerts at which I "assisted," the value and importance of which were, however, comparatively so trivial, that there is not the slightest need to chronicle them.

* See above, p. 105. † See vol. i. p. 192.

‡ See *Athenæum* for 1841, p. 478.

CHAPTER IV.

1842—44.

On the 2nd of November 1841 an event occurred at Covent Garden Theatre, which cannot be passed over in silence—the *début* of Miss Adelaide Kemble, the younger daughter of Mr. Charles Kemble, in an English version of Bellini's *Norma*, whose success was no greater than her remarkable talent warranted. As I did not witness that *début*, and only had the opportunity of seeing and hearing that truly gifted lady in the following spring, I have reserved what has to be written about her as connected with the succeeding year; and inasmuch as her brilliant career was but of much too brief a period, it will be perhaps more suitable to "say one's say" here and have done with it.

It will be remembered that I had seen Pasta in the *rôle* of the Druid priestess on the occasion of her benefit in June 1833,* and the appearance of Grisi in the same character has already been referred to.† With the vivid impression I still retained of the grandeur of the former and the shrewishness of the latter, in spite of the few points of excellence in her predecessor she had imitated, I was unprepared to accept the

* See vol. i. p. 267. † See vol. i. p. 292.

unqualified commendatory verdict that had been given, that "the *début* of Miss Kemble, and her entire triumph, had a value beyond that of the mere addition of a vocal actress of the highest order to the European company of distinguished artists;" and "that she was such an artist in the highest sense of the term, vocally taught and trained in the grandest school of European singing, and dramatically expressing a noble and original conception, with a power in which grace, feeling, and absence of affectation had each so large a share, that no plea for youth or inexperience need to be urged by the most fastidious of her friends."* I confess to have been agreeably disappointed; for not only was I at once led to indorse every word of such commendation, upon seeing and hearing her very early in the following year in the title *rôle* of the same opera, but in truth I was by no means unwillingly compelled to admit that her acting was as nearly as possible equal to the grand characteristics of Pasta, whilst her singing lost nothing by comparison with the excellence of Grisi. Retaining all the traditions of the great school which her aunt, Mrs. Siddons, and her uncle, John Kemble, had founded, and which, in spite of the somewhat diminished energies and powers of her father, Charles Kemble, had not entirely faded away, she at once convinced the doubting and confirmed the believing portions of her audiences in the opinion, that the encomiums with which those names had been loaded were neither exaggerated nor unwarranted. Adelaide Kemble trod the stage like a majestic queen, by turns manifesting the characteristics of the haughtiest mien and the sympathetic feelings of a woman and a mother. Her rebuke of Pollione was

* *Athenæum* for 1841, p. 860.

positively withering, whilst her tenderness towards her children and Adalgisa was essentially feminine. There was no occasion, in any one of the respective scenes, in which she did not rise with equal power and influence, whilst the manner in which, when fate had done its worst, she uttered the self-condemning truth, that the guilty one was no other than Norma herself, sent a thrill through the audience that pierced so much the more deeply because of its being exquisitely real. Her singing was in every respect equally good, its chief features consisting of an entire absence of meretricious ornament, and in the quiet decision of its rhythm. The quality of her voice was equal, and the compass extensive, so that she mastered the difficulties which Bellini had set down in his score with an ease and precision which bespoke the well-trained vocalist, who did not dash at difficulties and scramble through them, but who executed them honestly, and consequently with equal and unfailing intonation. Miss Adelaide Kemble was fortunate also in the Adalgisa who had been provided to play and sing with her—Miss Rainforth, a young but already well-accepted *artiste*, who, like her companion, remained much too short a time in her profession. Mr. W. Harrison was the Pollione, and Mr. Leffler the Oreveso; but, although each improved as time went on, they were at the outset of their taking so prominent a position quite unequal to an appropriate discharge of the calls Bellini's music made upon them.

During the year 1842 Miss Adelaide Kemble played in one or two other operas, Amina, in Bellini's *Sonnambula*, being the less notable, as Rossini's *Semiramide* was the more satisfactory. On her retirement in December of that year into private life it was truly said of her, "she was at home in all styles and

in all schools, bringing not merely her voice, but her mind, to bear upon the delivery of her song, and always with that love of her art, the end of which *must* be high excellence." It was likewise not less truly remarked by the same writer, that "it had been by no means the least remarkable fact of her career, that it was to intellect and to zealous industry, rather than nature, that she owed her high attractions as a vocalist. Others had sweeter, more flexible, more extensive voices; but none had thought so deeply, or studied with such an unremitting resolution to conquer difficulties and to achieve distinction."* Miss Adelaide Kemble, on her retirement from the stage, married Mr. Sartorius, a gentleman of fortune and position, and still lives beloved by her most intimate relatives and friends, and admired by those who have the privilege of her acquaintance.

The death of M. Laporte † had put an end to all the engagements for the season of 1842 that had been entered into; and for some time it seemed unlikely that any one would be inclined to undertake the weighty task, which had been said to have caused his sudden decease.‡ Mr. Lumley was at first coy, and pretended to hold aloof from committing himself either to the patrons of the theatre, on the one hand, or to the *artistes*, on the other; yet in spite of his professions, that nothing but the solicitations of the former induced him to throw himself into the breach, it soon became clear enough, that, although the name of M. Laporte had been put forward as that of manager and director, his legal friend and adviser

* See *Athenæum* for 1842, p. 1115.

† See above, p. 122.

‡ Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 20.

had for several previous years virtually filled that responsible position. Until M. Laporte had associated Mr. Lumley with him, everything, as connected with the *artistes*, had gone pretty smoothly. The monetary difficulties, which pressed most severely upon him, were the chief cause of his uneasiness; but no sooner had the influence of "*l'homme mystérieux*"—as Mr. Lumley confesses he was designated—been brought into action, and that "not a step henceforth was taken without his advice,"* than discontent and dissatisfaction sprang up and rapidly increased. That the leading *artistes* were whimsical and capricious was nothing new to M. Laporte; but he had been able to keep them in good humour by letting them have their own way, so far as might be practicable, and was generally able to induce them to serve both his interests and their own by seeming, at all events, to yield, if he did not absolutely do so. From 1835 all this was changed. Mr. Lumley adhered to one fixed rule—that a manager must be the sole master in his own theatre, ostensibly and positively. That he might have practically been so, without parading the fact, or losing caste, was by no means difficult. But this was not that gentleman's line of action; and to his obstinate adherence to that line may be attributed all the misfortunes which in after-years befell him. M. Laporte being no more, and every engagement cancelled, "the world was all before" the new manager, to venture single-handed upon that policy which had prevailed during the latter years of M. Laporte's rule. Mr. Lumley admits that "the first year of his operatic reign was destined to be replete with troubles, discontents, intrigues, conspiracies, and rebel-

* See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, pp. 6, 24.

lions."* And well it might be so; for he immediately tried his hand at breaking up *la vieille garde*, by refraining from offering its members engagements, and entering upon arrangements with comparatively unknown, and certainly untried, *artistes* in their room, not only without the cognisance of, or consulting with, Signor Costa,† as to their capabilities, but without even offering that *maestro* a renewal of the position he had held so ably and so long under M. Laporte till the very eve of the opening of Her Majesty's Theatre for the season! The consequence of this piece of stupidity—to call it by no other name—was deserved failure. The list of singers laid before the subscribers contained, as *prime donne*, the names of Mesdames Persiani,‡ Moltini, and Ronconi; as tenors, Rubini, for occasional performances previously to his final retirement, Mario, and Guasco; as baritones and basses, Ronconi, Santi, Panzini, and the Lablaches, father and son. To these were added Madame Frezzolini and her husband Poggi (tenor), when it was discovered that it would be impossible for Grisi to appear during the season, whose unlooked-for indisposition was apparently considerably to the advantage of Mr. Lumley's purpose. The season opened on Saturday, April the 12th, with Donizetti's *Gemma di Vergy*, the music of which was amongst the feeblest, and the story one of the most sickly and improbable that ever came out of the brain of an enervated librettist. In the presentation of this ineffective work, Madame Moltini *débuted* as the heroine, and Signor Guasco in the chief male character. The lady, although "a pleasing-

* See Lumley's *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 32.

† See *Athenæum* for 1842, p. 411.

‡ See above, p. 74.

looking soprano, with an agreeable voice, fairly trained, and some intelligence as an actress," made no impression whatever. The gentleman's claims and merits being, however, of a higher order, he not only succeeded in making a position for himself, but retained it during the one year he remained a member of Mr. Lumley's new *troupe*. Signor Guasco possessed "an organ of legitimate register, though neither strong, extensive, nor of manly qualities, which he understood how to use discreetly. As an actor, he displayed very little passion or power, and could only be taken as the best substitute that was to be met with until Rubini should return, or Mario be inclined to throw in his lot with the new-comers, during the absence of Grisi—a result which was only partially realised. Of Signor Santi nothing need be said, for he sung but once, and so inefficiently, that it was impossible he could be listened to a second time. Signor Panzini also made not the slightest impression; and but that the orchestra had been greatly improved, and the chorus rendered more efficient than heretofore, the performances could scarcely have been tolerated. Madame Persiani, who had failed to appear on the previous Tuesday, April 5th, as announced, on account of indisposition—which was believed to be feigned, and caused a considerable manifestation of disapprobation—put in an appearance on the following Saturday in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, with Ronconi—in the room of Tamburini and Coletti—who was, in after-years, to become one of the most thoroughly established favourites in Italian opera as represented in this country. Guasco was the Edgardo on this occasion, and largely increased the good opinion that had already been formed in his behalf. After one or two presentations of this opera, and also of the same

composer's *Elisir d'Amore*, combining the strong and effective cast of Persiani, Lablache, Ronconi, and Mario, on Tuesday, April 26th, Bellini's feeble *Beatrice di Tenda* was produced, with Madame Frezzolini*—whom Mr. Lumley had succeeded in obtaining to fill the void that Grisi made—as the heroine, Guasco being the lover, and Ronconi the tyrant husband. The new *prima donna* failed to make the impression which her continental fame had prognosticated for her. Her voice was somewhat worn, probably on account of illness, from which she had only recently recovered, as also because of the long and rapid journey she had to make to reach London by the day for which the announcement of her first appearance had been advertised. Notwithstanding this defect, her compass was discovered to be extensive, as well as of solid quality, in spite of its being strained in the manner of its production and by the peculiarity of its delivery. Then also, "with great pre-

* Mdme. Frezzolini (Herminie), born at Orvieto in 1818, was the daughter of a popular Italian buffo-singer, who instructed her in the rudiments of her art. Afterwards she studied, first under Nuncini at Florence, and then under Garcia at Milan, finishing her training at the former place under Tacchinardi. She *débuted* at Florence in 1838 in the *Beatrice di Tenda* of Bellini, and the *Marco Visconti* of Vaccai. In the same year she sang at Sienna and Ferrara, and in 1839 at Pisa, Reggio, Perugia, and Bologna, increasing her reputation so extensively, that offers of engagements poured in upon her. During the carnival of 1840, she sang in *Lucrezia Borgia* at the Scala, Milan, with brilliant success, whence she proceeded to Vienna for the spring season, and returning afterwards to Turin, there married Poggi, a tenor of no great artistic talent. After the fulfilment of her engagement in 1842 with Mr. Lumley at Her Majesty's Theatre, she returned to Italy, and appeared at Trieste, Rome, Venice, Naples, and several other towns until 1848, when she went to St Petersburg, remaining there for two years, after which, her health having suffered from the rigour of the climate, she went back to Italy, and was not heard in Paris till 1853. In her decline she went to the United States, where she was well received, and then retired from her profession. See Fétis' *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. iii. p. 336.

tensions to such combined flexibility of detail and breadth of outline in ornament, as are required to decorate a grand *cantabile*, her whole style appeared deficient in connection and polish. In person she was very tall, with a face which in repose was handsome, but which the labour of her singing impressed with very painful grimaces. Her attitudes, too, were stooping and angular, although such faults appeared to be less accidents than characteristics."* Guasco, on this occasion, made a stand that was not only creditable to his powers, but full of promise as regarded his future position; but Ronconi carried away all the honours of the occasion by his truly grand dramatic performance of Filippo, and his superb singing. This part, indeed, was one of his greatest tragic efforts, the effect of which, however, soon passed away, because the English public never accepted the opera, on account of its dark, lugubrious, and painful situations.

Another great demonstration was made by the latter celebrated and clever artist a few nights afterwards in the dreariest of modern operas, *Torquato Tasso*, which came to nothing simply because of the utter failure of his wife—who had insisted on supplanting Madame Moltini, for whom the part of Eleanora had been intended—only to have been worse treated here than on a similar occasion at Verona. There the wife had been received in silence, and the husband hooted for allowing her to perform. Here the latter was better received, and the former worse, and her fate for ever sealed.

Such a continued state of dreariness and failure was relieved to a great extent on Tuesday, May 10th, when the *Lucrezia Borgia* was given with an entirely new cast, Madame Frezzolini

* See *Athenæum* for 1842, pp. 387-8.

taking the part of the heroine, Signor Poggi that of Gennaro, Signor (!) Gramaglia that of Orsini, and Lablache that of Don Alphonso. Neither as regarded management of voice nor dramatic conception did the lady give any cause for the opinion already formed of her qualities to be changed; and comparisons could not fail to be made, to her manifest disadvantage, between herself and Grisi, who always remained unsurpassed in the "dark" character of the heroine. Poggi made not the slightest impression as Gennaro, and what he might have done by means of his singing he entirely destroyed by his acting. His death scene was so truly comical, and the appearance of his legs, which were encased in a most ridiculous pair of parti-coloured close-fitting pantaloons, so ludicrous, that shouts of laughter drowned the feeble demonstrations of applause that were attempted as the curtain fell. The only character in the opera really worth consideration was Lablache's version of Don Alphonso, in which, however, great as he was, he was inferior to Ronconi. The part of Orsini—which has been almost as prominent as that of Lucrezia since Alboni appeared in it, and such other *contralti* as Nantier-Didiée and Trebelli-Bettini have succeeded her—being intrusted to an incompetent male performer, was neither appreciated nor understood. From the combination of these circumstances the opera could not possibly create the slightest enthusiasm.

On the 31st of May—the evening after the insane attempt upon the Queen's life by John Francis—Mercadante's opera, *Elena Uberti*, was given in Her Majesty's presence, and before a most brilliant and enthusiastic audience, only, however, to draw comparisons between Madame Frezzolini's and Miss Adelaide Kemble's versions of the heroine, greatly to the dis-

advantage of the former. But this decided *fiasco* was not of much importance, because on the 7th of June Rossini's *Barbiere* was revived with a perfection that could scarcely have been looked for, considering the increasing indisposition of the company to work together harmoniously. Madame Persiani was the Rosina, which was one of her most consummate parts; Lablache again appeared as Dr. Bartolo; whilst Guasco was Almaviva, and F. Lablache, Figaro, out of compliment to his father, who had requested that he might show what was in him by means of that character, which in justice ought to have been given to Ronconi. That accomplished *artiste*, however, fully made up for the slight that had been passed upon him, by undertaking the comparatively small part of Basilio, which he made the very personification of shabby, sneaking, and spiteful stupidity, and by singing "La Calunnia" after a manner so farcical and grotesque, as to render it the most popular thing in as successful and interesting a performance of the most delicious of comic operas as was ever witnessed.

The next great event of the season of 1842 at Her Majesty's Theatre was the re-appearance of Rubini, who had been announced for a limited number of nights, previously to his final retirement from the stage. His engagement commenced June 13th, and was continued till the closing of the house, during which time he appeared in the *Sonnambula*, *Don Giovanni*, *I Puritani*, *Matrimonio Segreto*, *Anna Bolena*, and *Cosi fan tutte*, besides frequently singing his favourite air, "Vivi tu," from the *Pirata*. A very imperfect performance of Rossini's *Stabat Mater* was made a great feature in Mr. Lumley's "doings;" but the weakness of the several executants, and the invariable coldness of the reception given to them, made that performance

anything but satisfactory. Similar treatment being offered to the revival of Mozart's *Cosi fan tutte*, neither Persiani nor Rubini took the slightest pains with their respective parts. They seemed, indeed, to despair of producing any effect, and therefore treated the music and the audience with the utmost *nonchalance*. Madame Persiani was obviously hopeless of making any effect in the grand scena "Per Pieta;" and Rubini —who had been singing more beautifully than he had perhaps ever been heard to interpret Mozart's charming music, because less tremulously than usual—after the sestet "Dove son," dealt, with all he had to do, as if he had taken, not the mock poison of the farce, but a veritable sleeping draught. Lablache alone maintained his *prestige*, and sung as if he loved the music, and to please himself quite as much as his hearers. The *mise en scène* was simply contemptible, and would have disgraced a minor provincial theatre in the last century. For the ballet no outlay seemed to be too large or extravagant; but Mozart's opera, in this respect, seemed to merit nothing else than utter neglect and insult.

On June 25th there was another riot, which lasted no less than two hours, because Madame Frezzolini appeared in the *Beatrice di Tenda*, when *I Puritani* had been announced for Madame Persiani, but was changed at the last moment because of that lady's indisposition, so that no opera was given at all. Signor Costa's charming ballet, *Alma*, with Cerito as the heroine, however, calmed the storm.

On August 20th the season terminated, the decided opinion being everywhere expressed, both by the *artistes* and the public, that it was unequivocally the worst that had ever been witnessed in the memory of the oldest *habitué*. "The new

broom" had swept everything before it, even the smallest particles of popularity and satisfaction. Mr. Lumley congratulated himself upon his first experiment at independent management; but there can be no question that he then firmly laid the foundation of his future failure and ultimate ruin.

At the beginning of the year, Mr. Macready, who had the management of Covent Garden Theatre, was induced to place Handel's Serenata, *Acis and Galatea*, upon its boards, and employed the pencil of Mr. Stanfield, R.A., to produce such a series of scenes as had never before been painted for any place of public entertainment. Had he paid more attention to the manner of having Handel's music produced than to its scenic adornment, his venture would have been commendable; but wholly ignorant of music himself, and scarcely able to discern one tone from another, he intrusted that chief part of the preparation to Mr. T. Cooke, who played all sorts of tricks with the score, interpolating a mass of rubbish that was wholly unsuited to the design of the work, and totally irrelevant to its progress. There being no English tenor at that time obtainable for the part of Acis, Miss P. Horton—now Mrs. German Reed—was cast for it; and although she sang the music with all the judgment of a well-trained *artiste*, the necessity of constant transpositions to suit her voice had the effect of destroying the beauty of such delicious gems as "Love sounds the alarm," "Love in her eyes sits playing," and especially of the second part in the matchless trio, "The flocks shall leave the mountains." Miss Romer's Galatea was, rightly enough, pronounced mouthing, heavy, and ungraceful, whilst Mr. H. Phillip's version of Polyphene, although fairly sung upon the whole, was but a vulgar exposition of the part. The only portion of the

performance of this Serenata worth listening to, in spite of the limited powers of his organ, was Mr. Allen's Damon, and that told as such upon audiences with whom all the others were far greater favourites. The chorus was for the most part satisfactory, but the orchestra was very weak and imperfect—a result the less excusable because the music it had to play and accompany is by no means difficult. In spite of these disadvantages, *Acis and Galatea* had a tolerably successful "run," but not sufficiently so to induce Mr. Macready, or any other manager, to try another venture in a similar direction, not even with the advantages that could but have been derived from Mr. Stanfield's pencil.

At the Philharmonic Society's concerts of this year, nothing new of any note or character was brought forward until the sixth, when a new Symphony by Spohr, the argument of which was "the conflict of virtue and vice in the career of man," was introduced to the notice of the subscribers. Although showing much clever writing, the several parts of this complicated work failed to please, chiefly because of their possessing less of that spontaneity which prevailed in his better-known orchestral works, and more of the mannerism into which, although still a great *maestro*, he was fast falling deeper and deeper in the later period of his career. This Symphony was very fairly interpreted under the direction of M. Moscheles; but, with the exception of the second *motivo*, illustrative of "the age of sorrows," "a smooth and expressive *andante* in common time, crossed by phrases of a more passionate character, the antagonistic strains of feeling being most skilfully combined," it left no permanent impression upon the mind. As usual, wherever Spohr was concerned, his admirers raved about the magnificence both of

the conception and its treatment; whilst his detractors pronounced it to be intolerably puerile—the truth lying, in fact, between each opinion, that it was neither very good nor very bad.

The instrumental portion of the seventh Philharmonic Concert, conducted throughout by Mendelssohn, was as delightful as it was brilliant. It was on this occasion that his *Scotch Symphony* was given for the first time, than which, "since the production of Beethoven's *Ninth Symphony*, nothing of so high a class had been offered to the public." It was, indeed, nothing more than just and appropriate criticism, when it was said, that "a vigorous and fanciful invention pervaded it from the first bar to the last, wrought out with that happy and natural ease to which second-rate hands can never attain. The orchestra was not forced to uses for which it was never intended; there was no torturing of simple thoughts, in the vain hope of passing them as profound; no mystery work, to make empty heads shake solemnly, and convulse confused minds with factitious enthusiasm; but healthy nerve, with no lack of such picturesque beauty and poetic colour as characterise the newer style of composition."* A more memorable night than that of the first performance of the *Scotch Symphony* has scarcely to be recorded amongst my "Recollections." The last concert of the Philharmonic Society for the year was almost as brilliant as the fifth had been, thanks to the same genius, who played with all his accustomed force, energy, and precision his second pianoforte concerto, and conducted his own magnificent overture, the *Isles of Fingal*, which was encored, as every one wished could have happened in respect of

* See *Athenæum* for 1842, p. 459.

the concerto; for rarely, indeed, had so superb a composition been so superbly interpreted.

During the season of 1842 a prodigy made his appearance in London, who astonished every one who then heard him, and who has since, in spite of many faults of whim and manner, made his mark upon his age, as one of the very grandest of modern pianists—M. Rubenstein. He was supposed at this time to be between eleven and fifteen years of age; but whether younger or older, he was a remarkable genius, even at that early period of his career. Even then he was "possessed of sound musical acquirements, which gave him a calm command over the fugues of Bach, committed to memory; graceful expression, as instanced in his execution of some of Henselt's most delicate and charming 'studies;' and daring execution, inasmuch as he not only attempted, but fairly mastered, the difficulties of Liszt's compositions, from which the generality of his practised seniors wisely held aloof. A part of this extraordinary proficiency was, no doubt, ascribable to physical conformation, his hand being large, long, and fleshy, in no common proportions; but that the mind must have, even then, been at work, was evidenced by the reading he knew how to give of the oldest or newest music that was placed before him."* Of this celebrated pianist I shall yet have to speak when, in his maturity, he afforded less pleasure to many of those who had been amongst his warmest admirers on his first appearance; although not a few, myself amongst the number, except upon one or two rare instances, never for a moment hesitated in believing and asserting that every prognostication his youth

* See *Athenæum* for 1843, p. 268.

had unfolded was fulfilled when he arrived at the full maturity of his extraordinary talent.

Before passing away from 1842, a brief notice cannot be omitted of the German opera which was started at Covent Garden, where, for the first time, Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots* was heard by an English audience in something like its original entirety. The company was by no means strong. Madame Stökel-Heinefetter,* who played the part of Valentine, Mdlle. Lutzer, who filled that of Marguerite, and Herr Breiting, who was the Raoul, were concientious and much-esteemed artists, and, so far as a German version of the work has been witnessed, were amongst the best interpreters that were to be heard either at home or abroad. But Staudigl's Marcel was *the* character of the opera, his personification being as artistically rough and rugged as his singing was ponderously grand and genuine. The other characters were but meanly filled, and the band and chorus were by no means perfect; yet the presentation of this *chef-d'œuvre*, even in a confessedly imperfect manner, laid the foundation of that popularity in England which, so far from declining, is year by year increasing with the utmost rapidity.

The operatic season of 1843 had been heralded by Mr. Lumley with a very loud flourish of trumpets, but when the curtain went up for the first time on Saturday, March 11th, intense disapprobation was expressed on all hands. The opera selected for presentation was perhaps the most feeble

* Mdme. Heinefetter (Clara) was born at Mayence, Feb. 17, 1816, and made her first appearance at the Imperial Theatre, Vienna, Jan. 16, 1831, as Agatha in Weber's *Der Freischütz*, and continued her career there till 1837. Thence she went, to meet with unvarying success, to Berlin and Mayence. She died in a lunatic asylum at Vienna, where she had been ten years under restraint, Feb. 23, 1857. See Fétis' *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. iv. p. 279.

and uninteresting of all those which had ever been given in London, the *Adelia*, so far as the plot was concerned, besides being devoid of a single bar of melody, or harmony worthy of production, or above mediocrity. Madame Persiani was the heroine, whose voice was thinner and even more false than usual in intonation, which even her exquisite art in ornament, rarely shown to greater advantage, by no means concealed. Great promise had been made as to a Signor Conti, who was to replace Signor Guasco of the previous year; but his voice was so limited, that it was said to contain "only a note and a half" at the utmost higher than a baritone, as that voice was then beginning to be understood, and either singularly untoward, or else never properly developed in practice; whilst his only attempt at style was an adoption of Tamburini's least defensible peculiarity—preposterous roulades by way of cadences, as rough as they were incomplete.* The imperfect manner in which the duties of these two *artistes* were discharged was, however, borne with for the time, and afterwards condoned, because the announcement was speedily made, that the causes which had precluded the engagement of Grisi and the appearance of Mario in the previous year had been removed, and especially as Donizetti's *Belisario* was given for the *entrée* of Fornisari,† who was to occupy the place formerly filled by

* See *Athenæum* for 1843, p. 268.

† Fornisari (Lucien) appeared at one or two second-class Italian theatres about the year 1828, and in 1831 was promoted to the Scala at Milan. According to M. Fétis—who is not, unfortunately, always to be relied upon for accuracy—he was from 1831 in New York, then at the Havana, and afterwards in Mexico, up to 1840, when he was heard at Lisbon for two years. Fétis dates his appearance in London in 1845, where, he says, "Il y a reparu pendant plusieurs années!" See *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. iii. p. 296.

Tamburini, and more recently by Ronconi. The success of this *artiste* was the most triumphant that had been witnessed for many years. The musical world went wild at once concerning him, and imagined the equal of Lablache had been found in him. Nature had dealt bountifully with Fornisari, for he was of a magnificent stature and his countenance was radiant and handsome. His voice, too, was rich and sonorous; but a propensity to sing falsely was very soon apparent, and his resort to the use of the *vibrato*—of which he was in a great measure the originator—became irksome to listen to. His acting was energetic, though somewhat redundant; but he had made the Belisario so exclusively his one great part, that his popularity very soon began to wane, first when he essayed the *rôle* of the Count in the *Sonnambula*, in conjunction with Grisi and Mario; and afterwards more and more gradually as he appeared successively as Assur in Rossini's *Semiramide;* as Figaro in the *Barbiere;* and, lastly, as Don Giovanni. On the occasion of his *début* Fornisari was supported by Mesdames Persiani and Moltini, the latter having become a useful, agreeable, and acceptable *seconda donna*. Brambilla * returned as the contralto of the season after six years' absence, during which her once fresh and sympathetic voice had greatly deteriorated, although she was, to all intents and purposes, six years richer in taste and executive power. The novelties of the year were Donizetti's *Linda di Chamouni*, produced for Madame Persiani's benefit, June 1st, including the lady herself, Brambilla, Mario, Lablache, Fornisari, and Frederic Lablache, in the cast; and the same composer's *Don Pasquale*, for Lablache's benefit, June 29th, with the combined talent of Grisi,

* See vol. i. p. 153.

Mario, Fornisari, and the great *bénéficiaire* himself, each of which operas, although never better sung or acted than on their first introduction, are still accepted with the heartiest welcome. Another event deserves mention—the first appearance in England of Camillo Sivori the violinist, on the 18th May, who, as the pupil and, as was reported, the nephew of Paganini, was received with admiration and enthusiasm, and immediately took a position of the highest eminence, which he has retained to the present time.

On account of the immense improvement upon the year 1842, the season of Her Majesty's Theatre, when it closed in the month of August 1843, was admitted on all hands to have been one of the most gainful, the least enterprising, and the least expensive, that had ever been remembered, "the management having recovered its losses of the previous year, and secured a handsome surplus." That the season had been popular was to be ascribed to its contrast with that of the previous year, and especially to the attraction of the ballet, upon which Mr. Lumley never seemed to weary of being extravagantly profuse, not to say prodigal, in his expenditure. "Yet, notwithstanding the zeal and artistic finish of Persiani, and the brilliancy and archness of Grisi"—then in the zenith of her powers—neither the *Linda di Chamouni* nor the *Don Pasquale* had been "court cards," while the hackneyed operas, that had been revived for Fornisari, could only be preferred to former performances by that curiosity which would rather have any new *artiste* than the best old favourite. After all, as it was, with no small degree of truth, said, "it was fruitless to rail, to hope, or to counsel; for, so long as the amusement provided was satisfactory to the audience, and so long as Grisi

and Persiani sung as they did that year, and Brambilla worked her pleasant marvels without a voice, and Lablache continued his series of musical personations, the Italian opera would always continue a pleasant—yet more, a profitable—resort to all who were curious in vocal music." *

In the course of this year operatic music in English seemed to have made a fresh start, for not only was Clara Novello † heard at Drury Lane in the month of April, in a version of Pacini's *Saffo*, with Mrs. A. Shaw,‡ Mr. Allen,§ and Mr. H. Phillips,‖ but Miss Sabilla Novello attempted the part of Ninetta in *La Gazza Ladra*, whilst *Acis and Galatea* was transferred hither from Covent Garden, with the new cast of Acis, Mr. Allen; Galatea, Clara Novello; and Polypheme, Herr Staudigl, the best thing in the personation being the latter's version of the one-eyed Cyclops. The great German's conception of this part was perhaps somewhat too genial, but never was Handel's music better given. The voice, style, and feeling were all there, whilst the diction of the text was clear, appropriate, and singularly free from foreign accent. So successful was this venture that, towards the end of October, Rossini's *La Cenerentola* was given, with Mrs. A. Shaw as the heroine, who was applauded to the echo by hundreds of individuals, to whom the freshness of Rossini's music, better sung than the part was acted, was a delightful novelty. All this was but, as it turned out, a prelude to Mr. Balfe's *Bohemian Girl*, which, although it scarcely reached the solidity of one of the musical dramas for which the Paris Opéra Comique was

* See *Athenæum* for 1843, p. 757.

† See above, p. 24.

‡ See above, p. 12.

§ See above, p. 139.

‖ See vol. i. p. 187.

renowned, was yet so brimful of taking melody, so well sung and acted by Miss Rainforth, Mr. W. Harrison, and Mr. Borrani,* and besides so splendidly mounted, as at once to achieve a decided and permanent success, and to secure a more lengthened run than any purely English opera had ever before been known to obtain. The popularity of this opera was indeed so decided, that in a few days after its first presentation, its taking melodies were whistled in every street, morning, noon, and night; whilst "The heart bowed down with weight of woe," "I dreamt that I dwelt in marble halls," and "When other lips and other hearts," were ground almost to death by the hundred and one barrel organs, which were then, as they still are, the pest of the London thoroughfares. Its real merit may, however, be better ascertained from the fact that it has been translated into almost every singing language, and played in every theatre of note throughout the length and breadth of Europe, and still maintains its hold even upon the German public, whilst Weber's *Preciosa*, founded upon the same story, is, as a whole, all but forgotten.

At the second Philharmonic Society's concert of this year, Madame Dulcken,† who had been incapacitated from appearing at the first, played Chopin's Pianoforte Concerto in E minor—an ambitious effort, but by no means worthy of that "master," simply on account of its want of continuity. It produced very little pleasure, although the pianiste never perhaps played more gracefully or conscientiously. At the third concert Beethoven's "Chorale Fantasia" was rendered by Mrs. Anderson in

* Mr. Borrani sang first at Her Majesty's Theatre, under the name of Signor Boisragon. See above, p. 77.

† See vol. ii. p. 3.

her best manner, and what that was few persons, who remember the intelligence, *tours de force*, and brilliant execution of that gifted lady in the zenith of her fame, would desire to forget. In other respects that third concert was of a somewhat commonplace character, and but for the relief of Beethoven, as interpreted by Mrs. Anderson, would have been numbered amongst the dullest of the dull.

At the fourth concert the much-talked-of pianist, M. Dreyschock,* made his first appearance. This gentleman had been placed, without contest, among the most marvellous musical executants whom the increasing enterprise of the age had produced. Before he arrived in England, he was described as the pianist who "did in octaves what all others did in single notes." Comparing him, however, with other wonderful players, he seemed to have had more execution even than Thalberg†—that is, a wider reach of audacity in the spread of chords, and a superior rapidity and clearness of octave passages; the latter indeed so consummate, as to take away from the miracle the slightest appearance of difficulty. Than Liszt

* Dreyschock (Alexandre) was born October 15, 1818, at Zack in Bohemia, and in his earliest days showed a large amount of musical talent. At the age of thirteen he was placed under the tuition of Tomascheck at Prague, and studied under that master for four years. In 1836 he started upon his first musical tour, visiting Leipsic and several other of the minor German cities and towns. In 1840 he went to Berlin, thence to St. Petersburg, and in the following year visited Vienna. He obtained a brilliant success in Paris in 1843, which he increased in London during the same year. He then made the tour of Holland, returning to Germany by way of Cologne, taking Frankfort and Darmstadt *en route*. In 1845 he was at Dantzic; in 1846 at Dresden, and again at Berlin in 1847. After having been in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, he finally settled in Prague as a pianoforte-teacher, where he was still living in 1860. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. iii. p. 59.

† See vol. ii. p. 5.

he was more calmly certain, and manifested a new manner of producing a vibrating and prolonged tone, without exhibiting the charm of the former in this direction, or the fantasy of the latter of these contemporaries. Power, ranging between the uttermost force and the finest delicacy—sensible rather than sensitive expression—were the characteristics which were most strongly prominent in his performance. The *fantasia* and *caprice*, in which he appeared, were calculated to exhibit his peculiar attainments, but whilst he could not fail to astonish his hearers, he scarcely touched their feelings. One characteristic, however, of his manner won for him general approbation—an unpretending modesty, but too rare amongst possessors of such extraordinary powers.* At the fifth concert Mendelssohn's *Lobesang* was given, but was only remarkable for the tenor air which had been introduced since the Birmingham Festival of 1840;† whilst at the sixth Mr. W. Sterndale Bennett played a new concerto, which was not generally appreciated, because of its bearing too many evidences of the Mendelssohn type; and M. Sivori,‡ released from his ill-considered engagement at Her Majesty's Theatre, played the *allegro* of a grand concerto, than which nothing could have been more admirable, although the cadenza he introduced was almost note for note the same as that he had played but recently in the Haymarket. At this concert I heard Miss Dolby for the first time, and was convinced of the future that was before her, for a more pure and fresh contralto voice had rarely been heard, whilst her method, founded on the truest

* See *Athenæum* for 1843, p. 469.

† See above, p. 107.

‡ See above, p. 145.

school, was as graceful as it was broad and artistic. My conviction, as time will show, was fully verified. Of the seventh concert I can say nothing, not having been there; but at the eighth Spohr was present, and conducted his imaginative Symphony, "The Power of Sound," as well as his overture to *Der Alchymist*, and played one of his violin concertos, an *Andante* followed by a *Polacca*, the "number" of which I have forgotten; in which was clearly enough proved that, in spite of advancing age, his performance, for purity of taste, exquisite measurement of time, and richness of tone, proclaimed him the same admirable performer he had ever been. By his method of conducting he absolutely brought the Philharmonic band to be guilty of a *pianissimo*, which had hitherto been almost as fabulous as the "unicorn" amongst animals. This most desirable result was effected quite as much on account of the respect that was universally felt for him, as of the drilling he had enforced at the previous rehearsal.

In the autumn of 1843, as I was passing through Paris on my way to Geneva, to fulfil a literary undertaking, I availed myself of the opportunity of witnessing a performance, at the Grand Opéra, of Donizetti's *Favorita*, which had been written expressly for that theatre, and produced November 29th, 1840. The cast embraced the brilliant talent of Madame Stolz*

* Mdme. Stolz (Rosine) was born at Paris, Feb. 13th, 1815. Being endowed with a remarkable mezzo-soprano voice, she was admitted into a religious school of music, under the direction of M. Choron, and trained by a professor named Ramier. In 1830 that school was broken up by the Revolution, and the young *artiste* had no other resource than to become a theatrical chorus-singer for her livelihood. Whilst in the chorus of the Brussels Opera-house in 1832 she attracted the attention of Suel, the *chef d'orchestre*, by the intelligence she displayed, who at once set himself to teach her several small parts, with which she went to Spa as the second lady of the season. Thence she migrated to

(Leonora), Duprez * (Ferdinand), Barroilhet † (Alfonso XI.), and Levasseur ‡ (Balthazar), who afforded as rich a treat as

Antwerp and Lille, where she took the name of Stolz, to which she ever afterwards adhered, giving up the various aliases under which she had hitherto appeared before the public. At Lille she *débuted* with only moderate success in the *Pré aux Clercs* of Harold. She afterwards sung in French opera at Amsterdam, then returned to Antwerp, and not long afterwards re-entered the Brussels Opera-house as a *prima donna*. In 1835 Nourrit heard her in the part of Rachel in Halevy's *La Juive*, and spoke of her in the highest terms. In March, 1837, she married M. Lescuyer, the manager of the Rouen Theatre, and went with him to Paris, carrying letters of introduction to M. Duponchel, the director of the Grand Opéra, where she appeared in *La Juive*, August 25th, in the absence of Mdme. Falcon. From that day her position was taken, and she continued all but absolute "mistress of the situation" till 1847, when she retired from the active duties of her profession. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. viii. pp. 145, 146.

* Duprez (Gilbert Louis), born in Paris, Dec. 6, 1806, was trained in the same school wherein Mdme. Stolz learned the rudiments of her profession. He made his first appearance at the Odéon Théâtre, in a French version of Rossini's *Barbiere*, in 1825, and left it for Italy in 1828, where he remained till 1830. On his return to Paris, he played for a few nights at the Opéra Comique in *La Dame Blanche;* but having higher aspirations, he again went to Italy; and having completed his studies there, sung in most of the principal theatres of that country. His great desire to become the first tenor of the Paris Grand Opéra was fulfilled in 1836, when he became the successor of Nourrit, on making his *debut* in *Guillaume Tell.* Here he remained for many years without a rival, and was admitted on all hands to be one of the greatest tenors that had ever been heard. See Fétis's *Biographe Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. iii. pp. 84, 85.

† Barroilhet (Paul) was born at Bayonne, Sept. 22, 1810, and was brought up to become a merchant; but his passion for music was so great, that when only eighteen years of age he went to Paris, and became a pupil of the *Conservatoire*, where he studied for two years under Bauderali. Finding that he had very little chance of meeting with an engagement at the Grand Opéra—the great ambition of the pupils of the *Conservatoire*—he went to Milan, and placed himself under the tuition of Panizza, appearing at theatres of second or third-rate importance. When his style became better formed, and he had gained greater confidence, he sang at Genoa, Verona, Brescia, Bergamo, Trieste, Turin, Palermo, and finally at Rome, where Donizetti wrote his

‡ See above, p. 13.

ever could be realised in any place or country, on account of their individual dramatic and musical acquirements. The first three acts of this work, as they still and ever must do, lagged somewhat heavily, until the insulted Ferdinand broke his sword, and flung back the orders of knighthood in the king's face, with the utmost indignation at the degradation only too late discovered to have been put upon him; but the fourth act fairly roused the Parisians, as it has since English, Italians, and Germans, to the utmost point of hearty enthusiasm. The impression made by this one performance upon my memory has never been obliterated; and even now, when I compare it with the numerous other representations I have since "assisted at," it bears them all down, perhaps as much on account of the novelty, as of the excellence, with which I heard and saw the *Favorita* primarily rendered. Although Grisi was in many respects a more efficient Leonora than Mdme. Stolz ever might have been, there was yet an *élan* about the method of the one which the other never touched, and which not one of her successors has ever yet realised. Of the two most celebrated Ferdinands, Duprez and Mario, great as was the former, I must award the palm to the Italian; but such an Alfonso as M. Baroilhet has never yet been found, not even in M. Faure, who is his countryman's only legitimate successor in this and

Assedio di Calais for him, and later his *Roberto Devereux* and *Colombo*. In 1837 all chance of future success in his own country seemed to have vanished; for he was attacked with a disease of the throat, which threatened to deprive him of his voice. He wisely laid by for a time at Naples, and thence went to Paris to appear at the Grand Opéra in *La Favorita*—in which the *rôle* of Alfonso XI. was expressly written for him—with most unqualified success. He retired into comparative private life in 1849, in the midst of a brilliant career, and soon afterwards died. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelles des Musiciens*, tom. i. p. 254.

many other parts of equal importance. So far as the Balthazar of Levasseur was concerned, no one but Lablache—whom I once saw undertake that character—ever touched him. An equally effective cast may be at some future time brought together, but that one altogether superior will ever be met with is by no means possible.

Of the doings of Her Majesty's Theatre in 1844, under Mr. Lumley's continued management, there is very little indeed to remember with much pleasure. Grisi and Persiani continued to share the position of *prime donne;* an Englishwoman—a Miss Edwards, who appeared under the name of Favanti—was thrust into the place that Brambilla had occupied in the preceding year; Mario remained as the *tenore assoluto,* whilst Fornisari and Lablache made up the strength of the male portion of the company. A new tenor, Signor Corelli, was brought forward, on the first night the house opened, in Donizetti's *Adelia,* who, although a correct singer, was so little distinguished either in voice, style, or person, that he barely met with common civility. A similar fate awaited a M. Felix,* a new basso, who had Italianised his name to Felice; but a more *fiasco infelice* than he made has rarely been witnessed. Harold's *Zampa*—an opera wholly unsuited to any theatre of pretension—had been mounted for Fornisari, the expense of which might well have been spared, inasmuch as at the last moment he was detained by a lawsuit in Paris; and when he came to London he was no longer what he had been, and so rapidly faded away that in the following year he finally retired from the stage, and did not live long afterwards. Mdlle. Favanti,

* Brother of Mdlle. Rachel, and lessee of the French plays at the St. James's Theatre, who died 1872.

who undertook *le premier rôle* of *La Cenerentola*, was also a miserable failure, so that the opening prospects of the season were anything but promising. Nevertheless, Mr. Lumley, having no other contralto to fall back on, retained that lady's services, and thrust her into the parts of Arsace, Orsini, Adalgisa, and several others, to the disgust of every one who had the misfortune to listen to her incompetency, and whom the few good notes in her voice ceased to please after they had been once or twice heard. To the last, however, the manager persisted in asserting that "a dead set," made against her by various artists and their partisans, was the sole cause of her misfortune, "as little by little the original enthusiasm"—that had been got up by means of vehement puffing—"declined, and, the brief favourite of the day, she thus passed into obscurity."*

On the 20th June, Signor Costa's *Don Carlos* was produced for that eminent *maestro's* benefit. Unfortunately, I had not an opportunity of hearing this work, so that I cannot give my own impressions respecting it; but it was pronounced by one well calculated to decide, to be, in his judgment, "a far better opera than Mercadante's latest works which had been so much vaunted for their science, its music occupying a *mezzo termino* between the old executive and the new declamatory schools, inasmuch as there was a general seriousness of tone about the music which excited admiration for the skill with which it was constructed, and an effectiveness of particular pieces that never failed to please. Signor Costa," this critic went on to say, "is almost always happy in his church effects, as, indeed, the

* See *Reminiscences of the Opera*, pp. 86, 87. Mdlle. Favanti (Miss Edwards) was a pupil of the Royal Academy of Music. She died a few years since.

scholar and *protégé* of Zingarelli ought to be. . . . The chant behind the scenes from the monastery of Mount Carmel lingers by us whilst we are writing."* It is to be regretted that this opera has never since its production been repeated; but it had the misfortune to be written, as *Malek-Adel* also had been, for such exceptional voices as never can be again brought together in combination. Besides, if Mdlle. Favanti failed because of the prejudice raised against her by artists and their partisans, Signor Costa's *Don Carlos* had very little to thank the manager for, who coolly says of it, after he had thrown all the obstacles he possibly could in the way of its production, that, although "well mounted, and supported by Grisi, Mario, Lablache, and Fornisari, like its predecessor, it utterly failed to produce any prominence. It survived but a very few nights, and then, like *Malek-Adel*, sank into the vast Limbo of forgotten works; being, *in a managerial point of view*, a failure"†

Towards the close of the season, Moriani,‡ one of the best reputed tenors in Italy of the time, and especially a great dramatic *artiste*, as was speedily proved, made his appearance somewhat unexpectedly, "whose engagement," Mr. Lumley avers, "had not been promised, but was thrown over and above into the already full lap of the subscribers."§ His *début* took

* See *Athenæum*, 1844, pp. 603-4, 673.

† *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 89.

‡ Moriani (Napoléon), born at Florence about the year 1806, was of a distinguished family, and educated to become an *avocat*. Music, however, which he had cultivated as an amateur, was to become his profession; for he took to the operatic stage in 1833; and being at once successful, he continued his career, with increasing admiration, up to 1847, when, from failure of his voice, his somewhat remarkable career came to a conclusion. See Fetis's *Biographie Universelles des Musiciens*, tom. vi. p. 199.

§ *Reminiscences of the Opera*, pp. 82, 89.

place in Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, under somewhat adverse circumstances, for he was suffering from hoarseness at the time of his reaching London, from which he had not wholly recovered when the hour for his appearance arrived. His success was, however, decisive. Nothing had been previously heard to surpass the tone of his splendid voice, which was rich and sweet without the slightest lusciousness, manly and sonorous in the lower, and thrilling in the upper part of its register—a chest voice of two octaves in compass, managed in accordance with the canons of the new Italian school; so that if not an executive he was at least an expressive singer.* As an actor he was passionate and pathetic, without being either violent or spasmodic. The success which this new comer obtained in the *Lucia di Lammermoor* was increased by his playing the part of Percy in the *Anna Bolena* afterwards, although it did not display his powers to the best advantage, and fully confirmed, when he appeared as Gennaro in the *Lucrezia Borgia*, the sentimental tones of which exhibited his splendid voice to much advantage. The rivalry, however, that could but naturally spring up between Mario and himself, had the effect of hindering the growth in public favour that he might justly have expected to win, and this disadvantage was not diminished by the uncertainty which he continually exhibited in his manner of singing and acting. Even had there been no Mario to contend against, it is doubtful whether Moriani would ever have sufficiently "made his public" in London to have become an established favourite. But one other novelty was given during the season of 1844, and that at its eleventh hour—Ricci's *Corrado d'Altamura*, a heavy work, which, although supported

* See *Athenæum* for 1844, p. 628.

by Grisi, Mario, and Fornisari, made not the slightest impression on the night when it was given—the first and last time it was ever heard in London.

Previously to the commencement of the Italian operatic season, Donizetti's *Favorita* was given at Drury Lane in succession to Rossini's *William Tell*,—which I did not hear,—with M. Duprez as Ferdinand, in which he fairly took the town by storm, although many of his best efforts were somewhat marred by an imperfect English pronunciation. He was fairly supported by Miss Romer and Mr. Stretton, and drew immense houses during the few nights in which he appeared. In the November of this year Mr. Balfe produced two operas, the *Queen of Cyprus* and the *Daughter of St. Mark*, which failed to increase the popularity he had won in the previous year by means of the *Bohemian Girl*. Their production cannot, however, be wholly passed by *sub silentio*, because they were the means of bringing forward two singers, Messrs. Burdini and Weiss,* the latter of whom became the legitimate successor of Henry Phillips, whilst the former was speedily forgotten, although at first the anticipations that were formed concerning each were in direct opposition to this result.

At the beginning of the year 1844, M. Jullien, who had inaugurated a series of Promenade Concerts at the English Opera-house, now the Lyceum, removed to Covent Garden, and began that strange mixture of good, bad, and indifferent selections, which took hold of the public immediately, and served, in the first direction, to improve the taste and enlarge

* Mr. Weiss died at an early age, four or five years ago, much regretted by a numerous circle of friends.

the knowledge of the rising generation, who were influenced by musical aspirations. In spite of an enormous amount of charlatanry in this energetic Frenchman's proceedings, he became a universal favourite, and might have prospered to the end of his extraordinary career, as he did at first, could he have borne the success with which his efforts were rewarded. In the progress of English musical instruction his name must always deservedly occupy a prominent position; for at his concerts some of the greatest orchestral works that ever were written were performed with a precision and a completeness which not only interested but elevated the tone of mind of his overflowing audiences. A man who did so much and so well as M. Jullien accomplished within the few years that he was before the public deserved a better fate than befell him; and gladly would I pay his memory a tribute of more than passing recognition, because the advantages he initiated have become not only permanent, but are still steadily increasing.*

At the second Philharmonic Concert, a violinist of the highest eminence, Herr Ernst, who had been heard at the Manchester Festival in the previous month of April, performed Spohr's Dramatic Concerto, and a series of variations on the air "Tu vedrai," from Bellini's *Il Pirata*, "in a manner and delivery combining a mixture of solid grandeur and expression of self-control and enthusiasm," which at once established him as a player of the highest eminence. Even, however, at that time his tone, always thin and wiry, was occasionally untrue—a defect which lamentably increased in after-years when he became a confirmed invalid.† At the third

* M. Jullien died by his own hand in a lunatic asylum near Paris.

† Herr Ernst is no more.

concert an opportunity was given of contrasting this new comer with Signor Sivori, not at all to the disadvantage of either. Signor Salvi, a tenor of refined taste and smoothness, also appeared, and was at once accepted as an acquisition of no mean character. At the fourth concert Mendelssohn appeared as the conductor, and gave an impulse to the whole evening's performances, which foretold improvement as about to take place in the largest degree. A German violinist, Herr Pott, tried his fortune, and failed; but a new singer, Mdme. Castellan, afterwards to become a universal favourite, was more fortunate, whilst Herr Staudigl brought back his best voice, and his soundest and most impassioned German style, to charm the hearts of all his hearers.

At the fifth concert another violinist—a mere boy—who was afterwards to become the grandest executant of his times, Herr Joachim, not only played, but played with, Beethoven's Concerto, by memory, with such a thorough understanding of the author and command of his instrument, as to place him at the summit of his *métier* at once. Nothing could be more sensible, sensitive, or firm than his reading of this great composition—the grandest means of execution for the most difficult of instruments that ever was invented, and to which only one other work at all approaches within an easy distance—that of Mendelssohn. Very few performers indeed, in every respect so satisfactory as this mere boy then proved himself to be, had ever in my time come before the public, or offered such promise of the brilliant career he has since enjoyed. There was no fear, however, of his being spoiled by praise; for his disposition was so modest, and his manner so genuine, that the perils before him seemed, as they have proved to be, far less

formidable than usual. Mendelssohn was his most generous friend, and loved him as if he had been his own child, and never was weary in giving him advice—always conscientiously followed—and rewarding his assiduous attention to practice and study with the warmest commendation.

The manifest advantage of the conductorship of these concerts having been placed in the hands of one competent conductor during the year 1844 induced the directors to come to a decision, for which they were greatly ridiculed at the time, but, as events proved, was the greatest *coup* for the preservation of the Society that was ever made—the offer of an engagement to Signor Costa for this important duty. Amongst the most vehement of that gentleman's detractors at the time was Mr. H. F. Chorley, who, in the *Athenæum* of November 16th, went out of his way to heap ridicule both upon the directors and the gentleman of their choice, prognosticating that, "as it could but be extremity, as little as celebrity, which had driven the former to a choice as strange as was their own gross discourtesy to the latter but a few years previously, when they rejected him as a candidate for membership, the only result of such proceeding would inevitably be outrageously unpopular, both with Germans and Englishmen, as being the first step towards making these Concerts a dependency on the Opera-house, for the sake of securing the services of the Italian singers."*

Mr. H. F. Chorley lived to repent of his "hot haste" in denouncing Signor Costa's election as little less than comical, and to admit that "he not only established his claims, but worked successfully against an unfavourable impression," that

* See *Athenæum* for 1844, p. 1051.

would have beaten any other man, as a conductor of Symphonic and instrumental, and especially German music. What was done by way of improvement in the first season of Signor Costa's administration astonished everybody, and, whilst it delighted the true lovers of art, it confirmed the antipathy of those who felt that they had been overlooked. But these are matters for future consideration, and the summary of the musical events of the year 1844 may well be closed with this reference to an approaching series of events that must receive attention and consideration in forthcoming chapters.

CHAPTER V.

1845—49.

THE year 1845, so far as operatic arrangements were concerned, will always be remembered as that in which Verdi was first fairly introduced to the British public, the work by means of which his characteristics were made known being *Ernani*, the plot having been founded on one of Victor Hugo's recently published sensational novels. Full of plagiarisms as was every "number" of that opera, it took more or less with the public because of the large amount of tune with which it abounded, whilst the constant succession of passage after passage in unison excited some degree of curiosity on account of its novelty. By means of this opera a new *prima donna* was introduced to the *habitués* of Her Majesty's Theatre—Madame Rita-Borio—who, according to Mr. Lumley, only achieved a certain amount of success "with modifications,"* although "possessed of an excellent soprano voice of two octaves or more, sufficient in power and conscientiously in tune." As an actress, Madame Rita-Borio made no impression, and she was much more approved of in the concerted music than in those scenes wherein the weight of the plot rested more especially upon herself. Signor Moriani,† who returned with his voice in good order, maintained rather than increased his reputation

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 105.

† See above, p. 155.

by his personation of the character of the hero; whilst Fornisari showed little else than decay in the tremulousness with which he sang the music, and exaggerated "the business" appertaining to the character of Don Ruy Gomez. A new baritone, Signor Botelli, who played the part of Don Carlos, "was summarily despatched with faint praise;" and well he might be so, because his presence was certainly more stout and portly than his voice and method were perfect. In spite of considerable resistance, *Ernani*, however, "ran on with a moderate degree of success for several nights during the ante-Easter season, without contributing in any marked degree to the financial prosperity of the year,"* and without making sufficient mark ever to become thoroughly acceptable.

After *Ernani* had thus been tried only to fail, Mr. Lumley produced M. David's *Le Désert*, more in the shape of a musical *fête* than as an operatic performance.† This work, however, never took for an instant with the public, chiefly—as not a few persistently asserted—because of the absence of *mise en scène*, but, as the best judges more accurately decided, on account of the inequality, not to say puerility, of the greater part of its construction.

On the 1st of April a really competent *prima donna*, Madame Castellan,‡ who was to delight the British public for several years to come, débuted in the *Lucia* of Donizetti, in the place of Persiani, and afterwards became that lady's legitimate successor. She speedily confirmed the excellent impression she had made in that opera by her personation of Amina in Bellini's *La Sonnambula*. Madame Castellan was French by birth,

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 105. † Id. ibid.

‡ See above, p. 159.

and had many disadvantages to contend against in selecting the Italian stage as the arena for the manifestation of her powers, which, to the last, were much more successful in musical than histrionic effort. Her voice was of most brilliant compass, extending from B flat below the stave to C sharp or even D above, the quality of which was as even as it was agreeable. Her accent and articulation at this time were scarcely finished; but she was so painstaking and persevering, as well as ever ready to accept and follow sound advice, that she speedily mastered these deficiencies. She had the advantage also of being exceedingly good-looking, although rather short in figure, whilst the absence of anything like pretentious effort made the way for her acceptance as easy as it was safe.

On Saturday, April 8th, Grisi reappeared as the Diva in Bellini's *Norma*, and, without exception at this period of her career, which might be said to have reached its zenith, I never heard her sing worse. In referring to my notes on this performance, I find this entry: "Unless Grisi pulls up immediately, her race is all but run." She did "pull up," however, and with a vengeance too, as Mr. Lumley had to discover to his cost, when, all but unaided, she positively sang down Mademoiselle Lind, by her energetic and determined resolution to bear the entire weight of the Royal Italian Opera—to the foundation of which her assistance was most important and invaluable—upon her shoulders during the several seasons that it had to struggle against difficulties of the most stupendous character. Lablache was also scarcely himself; and whilst Moriani made nothing of Pollione, Mademoiselle Rosetti must be said to have done less with Adalgisa. Mr. Lumley—being content to rely upon a *troupe* of juvenile dancers, who were

called "Les Danseuses Viennoises," and about whose engagement, according to his own version, he had to contend with almost insuperable opposition—adhered to the old and well-worn *répertoire*, putting up *Don Pasquale*, *Lucia*, *Semiramide*, *Il Barbiere*, *I Puritani*, *Il Pirata*, and *Don Giovanni*, much after the same fashion in which they are reiterated in the present day, because of his being able to rely on these time-honoured operas, when given with their customary exponents, proving attractive to their many and respective admirers.* But, warned by the criticism of the leading organs of the press, that the preference he gave to the ballet, as the principal feature of Her Majesty's Theatre, would certainly tend in the end to his disadvantage, that gentleman was induced to bring out Donizetti's *L'Elisir d'Amore* on April 30, for Madame Castellan, by which, notwithstanding her early success, that lady did but little to improve her position. However well she might have been able to sing the music, she had not sufficient acting capabilities to make anything of the village coquette. A Signor Corelli was substituted for Mario, as the lover—a new-comer, who had not an idea of method or refinement, and seemed to imagine that it was enough to practise his *solfeggi* upon the stage to succeed to the position Mario had held in this opera, no less than in his own department, against all comers. He was one of the numerous failures whom Mr. Lumley persisted in pushing forward, in the vain hope of supplanting the only tenor of his day that was worth listening to, and able to fill the coffers of Her Majesty's Theatre. On account of such defects, *L'Elisir* was much too coldly received to bear frequent repetition. Soon afterwards

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 113.

Donizetti's *Linda di Chamouni* was substituted; and herein Madame Castellan made her greatest hit during the season, inasmuch as she "had freshness of voice and youthfulness of appearance, which suited the character well, if she did not possess the pathos and admirable finish of Madame Persiani." The only disadvantageous change in the cast was the substitution of Moriani for Mario, in the lover's part. That which was graceful with the latter became clumsy with the former, the character seeming to have been altogether ill-fancied, if not carelessly studied. Yet, upon the whole, the opera was welcome.*

On the 24th June the *début* of Mdme. Rossi-Caccia and M. Barroilhet,† who had been long promised, took place, the dull and never popular opera *Roberto Devereux* being selected for the occasion. Neither appearance was a success. The lady had a guttural and tremulous voice, of limited power, with four or five very high *harmonica* notes, which it was her fixed idea to exhibit on every possible occasion. Her voice had, in fact, been strained, and was therefore anything but pleasing, as may easily be understood, when it is said that her declamatory passages were nothing else than a succession of screams. Had I not heard M. Barroilhet in Paris in the previous year, I should never have believed him to have been the great singer I have represented him to have been. I could at first scarcely indeed imagine that he was the same man, and for a while I was all but persuaded that an incompetent substitute had been palmed off in his place. It was, however, soon apparent that he was "the right man"—but certainly not "in the right place"—by the excellence of his

* See *Athenæum* for 1845, p. 549.

† See above, p. 151.

method, and the fervour of his dramatic feeling, which was so true, that whenever he sang, it was like repose and good news to the ear after it had been lacerated and mocked.* "Both came before the English public with a very high reputation, but neither achieved any notable success, or made any very durable impression." †

On account of the quarrel which had been set up between himself and Grisi and Mario by Mr. Lumley, those truly favourite *artistes* were scarcely heard during the season, to the annoyance of the subscribers, who protested loudly against their absence. Whether or no it was the manager's object, by such means, to break down the influence of *la vieille garde*, he certainly could have adopted no more effective means for carrying out such a purpose. That there was blame on both sides cannot for an instant be doubted; but it is scarcely possible to accept all that Mr. Lumley has placed before the public in his *Reminiscences* as being an exact or impartial statement of the condition of Her Majesty's Theatre at the close of "the stirring and prosperous season of 1845," as he himself has designated it.‡

The proposed arrangement, already adverted to, "that Signor Costa should undertake the direction of the Philharmonic Concerts during the season of 1845, having fallen through, Sir H. R. Bishop was substituted in his place." A worse appointment could scarcely have been made, as may be perceived by the following remarks, which, severe as they are, were not by any means unwarranted: "Lenient to torpidity in

* See *Athenæum* for 1845, p. 638.

† See *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 119.

‡ Id. pp. 122-131.

his presidency over rehearsals; courageous to temerity in changing, adding to, and otherwise transmogrifying music committed to his care; incorrect in almost every *tempo* he takes, whether it be German or Italian music, Mozart or Handel, we have experience enough from the Ancient Concert performances to augur doleful results from Sir H. R. Bishop's promotion to a situation in every respect so much more trying. His has always been the most stagnant Philharmonic Concert of the season, and eight similar inflictions will throw back the average intelligence, sensitiveness, and spirit of the orchestra's performances to a point even behind their old inequality."* Unfortunately these predictions were to the letter fulfilled, and although a change speedily took place, a more dreary Philharmonic season was never passed during the entire period of the Society's existence.

At the first concert I had the pleasure to hear M. Sainton, who played one of Spohr's concertos with exquisite taste, brilliancy of execution, and purity of tone, and then and there established that reputation which he still retains, not only as a soloist, but as the *chef d'attaque* of those orchestras which Sir M. Costa still continues to direct. At first M. Sainton's manner partook somewhat largely of the French school; but that peculiarity he quickly laid aside, as not likely to please in England, for a more broad and expressive method, of which he has been ever since one of the most successful and intelligent interpreters. Mdme. Oury also played a concerto on this occasion—Beethoven in C minor—neatly and commendably, but by no means did herself justice by the introduction of a *cadenza* in the first *motivo*, which, although said to have been

* See *Athenæum* for 1845, p. 204.

written by Czerny, was singularly inappropriate. The vocalists were Mdme. Albertazzi, Miss Rainforth, and Signor F. Lablache.

After the second concert, Sir H. R. Bishop retired from a position he was never calculated to hold, upon the score of indisposition, which meant nothing else than failure. At their wits' end how to fill up the vacant post, the directors fell back upon Moscheles, whom they engaged to conduct the last five concerts—an appointment which generally satisfied both musicians and amateurs, but from which scarcely any of the anticipated beneficial results were realised. At the fourth concert Madame Dulcken* played Mendelssohn's second concerto exceedingly well; and Sivori † gave a portion of the violin concerto of the same composer; but the event of the evening was the *début* of the German baritone, actor, and concert-singer, Herr Pischek, of great celebrity in his own country, and second only to Staudigl ‡ in popular Teutonic estimation. Although, like many others, I was little disposed in general towards German concert-singing—owing to some experience of its roughness, nasality, and indifference to the delicacies of vocal art—I confess to have been excited by the new-comer to the old thrill and the old glow, so rarely experienced now-a-days, that it is sometimes feared that the heaviness may exist in one's own heart, when it is really chargeable on the far too many mediocrities that assail instead of enchanting the public. But there was no mistrusting the effect produced by Herr Pischek. His voice was a baritone of the richest quality, capped

* See above, p. 3.

† See above, pp. 145, 149.

‡ See above, p. 142.

by a falsetto of some three or four notes, but so strong and pure that the discrepancy between the two voices was felt far less than was customary, whilst each was under much closer discipline than the Germans then thought, as they still think, generally needful to apply. Herr Pischek's *sostenuto* was perfect in every gradation of tone; his execution was also neat and facile, with the exception of his shake, which was ambitious rather than exact in its definition of the two tones. But the attribute which distinguished him from other vocalists of his day was separate from either voice or execution, or that thoughtful good sense without which neither one nor the other can claim an instant's attention. "He had genius—a feeling for what was passionate and picturesque, such as had not stirred the British public for many days—a gift it may be difficult to define but impossible to dispute. On the occasion of his *début*, Herr Pischek gave a rather dull song from the *Faust* of Spohr with so much tenderness as to make it sound sweet, fresh, and natural; and a somewhat flowing ballad by Lindpaintner, delivered with so much Troubadour animation as to call up images of the tent, the leaguer, and the castle hall, and to make the trite and weary sights and sounds of a concert-room vanish like so many shows and echoes of the *Fata Morgana*. In fact, the effect produced by this singer was testified to one and all who could appreciate him by the necessity of breaking away from the cut-and-dry phrases of criticism which suffice for the ninety-nine, but are felt to be meagre when employed to describe the hundredth! He was indeed to be regarded as that combination of the musician, singer, and poet which makes the *artiste* of the highest order, and there was not the slightest fear of his

becoming superficial, mannered, or extravagant on a closer acquaintance." *

A year or two afterwards I heard Herr Pischek at Vienna, where he was fulfilling a "starring" engagement, in *Il Don Giovanni*, and then for the first and last time I was disappointed in him. That he sang the music allotted by Mozart to the libertine magnificently was not to be disputed; but he was no more the Spanish Don, refined in manner, courteous in demeanour, and fascinating in his courtships, than were Zuchelli, Tamburini, Fornisari, Ronconi, Belletti, Graziani, or any other attempting exponent of that most difficult *rôle*. The only *artistes* that ever reached the true ideal were Ambrogetti † and Garcia; ‡ and those who never saw either of those "masters of their art," cannot have the least notion of what can be made of the hero of Mozart's operatic *chef-d'œuvre*. Herr Pischek in this character had not the slightest notion of the requisite *finesse*. He paid court to Zerlina as if he were a German boor; and in the supper scene out-heroded Herod by swallowing glass after glass of champagne like a sot, and gnawing the drumstick of a fowl, which he held across his mouth with his fingers, just as any of his own middle-class countrymen may be seen any day of the week all the year round at the *mit-tag* or *abend-essen* feeding at one of their largely-frequented *tables-d'hôte*. Although devoid of delicate taste and feeling on this occasion, Herr Pischek showed his good sense, whilst singing in England, by adhering to his own country's language and music, so that there was no cause to "lament a coarse competition with the more smooth and liquid

* See *Athenæum* for 1845, p. 500.

† See vol. i. p. 31. ‡ Ibid., p. 101.

Italians, nor grotesque and unfinished English," distasteful to every refined and well-educated ear. Herr Pischek sang at one or two of the succeeding Philharmonic concerts, but I had not the gratification of hearing him. The season terminated with greater *éclat* than might have been expected from its commencement, M. Moscheles having done his utmost to restore that *prestige* which would have so waned as scarcely to have been within the possibility of recovery, had Sir H. R. Bishop retained the *bâton* beyond the first two concerts. Towards the close of the season Mr. W. S. Bennett was named as the probable successor to M. Moscheles,—a position to which he did not attain till several years afterwards, and because of which a very large amount of ill-feeling was originated, which even now has scarcely been allayed. However, the reference to such untoward circumstances will come to be recorded in due time, when the facts as they existed will be mentioned without note or comment.

During this year (1845) Mr. John Ella's "Musical Union," which had been inaugurated in the previous season, took form and substance, and was the means of introducing, exclusively for the performance of chamber music, several celebrities to the public, amongst the most notable of whom were MM. Döhler, Piatti, Röckel, Deloffre, &c. Great and most unworthy opposition was offered to the establishment of this Society; but it still thrives after twenty-eight years of perseverance, and still continues to be the best amongst all the other speculations that have been set on foot for the same purpose,—the exclusive performance of the chamber music of the best writers, ancient and modern,—which, but for its existence, might never have been started.

Before the commencement of the operatic season of 1846, the directors of the Philharmonic Society again offered the post of conductor to Mr. Costa, as he now began to be called, since he had become a naturalised Englishman; which, after due consideration, and under stipulation that the musical arrangements should be entirely left to his own immediate superintendence, he was induced to accept. Mr. Lumley, who had decidedly numbered that gentleman as one of the leading spirits of *la vieille garde*, therefore, availed himself of this opportunity to get quit of him, and engaged Mr. Balfe in his room. Upon this a correspondence—almost immediately published—ensued, on which, the several parties being at issue on facts, comment was out of the question, the only alternative on the part of the public, who were taken into the dispute, being to form their opinion which of the two was right and which wrong, upon the character of the individuals themselves. Most assuredly never did any theatre or any director lose a better official, in every sense of the word, than Mr. Costa, and most unquestionably Mr. Balfe did not prove himself equal to the new and difficult duties he was induced to undertake.

Notwithstanding the rupture of Mr. Costa's long connection with Her Majesty's Theatre, and Mr. Lumley's pertinacious insistence that the establishment of a rival opera-house was already a foregone conclusion on the part of *la vieille garde*, Mdmes. Grisi and Castellan, together with Mario, Lablache, Fornisari, Corelli, and other members of the previous year's company, adhered to their engagements, and continued throughout the season to fulfil their duties to the satisfaction of the public. In addition to these, Mdlle. Sanchioli, a *prima donna*

of reputation from Rome, whose dramatic talent was said to be great; and Mdlle. Corbari, a competent *comprimaria*, celebrated everywhere for her lovely face and elegant figure, were engaged. The former débuted on the 3rd March, the opening night of the season, in Verdi's *Nabucco*, which was presented under the title of *Nino*, to avoid the shock which might be naturally given to the British public by the introduction of a Scriptural subject upon the stage. With Mr. Lumley Mdlle. Sanchioli evidently found no favour, for he reports of her that, "wild, vehement, and somewhat coarse, she attracted and excited by her power, spirit, and fire, but failed to charm;" that "as a declaiming, passionate vocalist she created an effect; but" that "the very qualities which rendered her so popular with an Italian audience, acted somewhat repulsively upon English opera-goers;" that "the lack of refinement in her style was not in their eyes redeemed by the merit of energy;" and that "the electric impulse that communicated itself to the Italians fell comparatively powerless on the British temperament;" but that "notwithstanding such defects she was in many respects the right woman in the right place, in this melodramatic opera."* Without being wholly prepared to indorse this opinion, I may say that my own tends very much in the same direction, since I thoroughly agree with what was said of her at the time by a more competent critic, that "her voice was extensive and strong, whilst her delivery of the grandiose *cantabile* passages with which her part was filled was obviously in accordance with the composer's intentions;" that "there was a certain wildness and want of temperance in her singing, apparently arising from inexperience rather than timi-

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 145.

dity, which would have to be amended ere she could take rank as a *prima donna*. Her action and gestures also stood in need of steady training."* Mdlle. Corbari, notwithstanding her simplicity and grace, was never acknowledged as anything more than an *altra-prima*, although she had a young, fresh, and tuneful voice, which, together with her prepossessing appearance, constituted her an *artiste* of promise. That promise, from some cause or other, was by no means fulfilled. She remained only during this season a member of Mr. Lumley's troupe, having seceded in the following year with all the other *artistes*, who, with the exception of Lablache, departed *en masse;* and even he, loud as Mr. Lumley's panegyric is concerning him, only remained behind, not from any inordinate love either for Her Majesty's Theatre or for its manager, but on account of an unfortunate mistake that was made at Calais, when M. and Mdme. Persiani were either in this (1846) or the following year returning to England. In the *Nabucco* Corelli was the tenor, and Botelli the second bass, Fornisari being the representative of the impious king. But "as matters stood, the vocal corps was weaker than it had been at the opening of the opera for several preceding years; and as no programme had been issued, there was no telling what was to be expected." Crude and uncultured as the *Nabucco* was, it was successful.*

On Tuesday, the 17th of March, to use Mr. Lumley's own words,† "the 'run' of *Nino* (*Nabucco*) was interrupted to give trial to three young artists of some note and of still greater promise," in *Ernani*—Mdme. Pasini, Signori Castigliano (a pupil of Rubini) and Bencich, as soprano, tenor, and bari-

* See *Athenæum* for 1846, pp. 250, 251.

† *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 147.

tone—in the principal characters of that opera, every one of whom failed, the last being only considered tolerable. Mdme. Pasini was a small lady, with a sour, soprano voice, sharper and shriller as it mounted above the line, who was neither a musician nor an executant. The tenor had a mediocre voice, and the baritone traded upon a lusty organ never for a moment in tune, and a redundancy of vulgar conventional Italian gesticulation. The orchestra scrambled coarsely along to keep pace with the singers, still more to keep them together, which was not effected.*

On the 28th of March Madame Castellan made her *rentrée* in the *Linda di Chamouni*, and was supported by Mdlle. Gaetanina Brambilla, as Pierotto, who was possessed of an intelligent rather than a handsome countenance, and a sufficient contralto voice, more extensive and even in its compass than was at the time generally met with, which she used steadily and conscientiously, but without refinement. On the 2nd of April *Belisario* was revived, when Mesdames Castellan and Sanchioli sang together for the first time. Verdi's *I Lombardi*—which had been received with only a moderate degree of success—was again played soon afterwards, but made no impression worth recording, the music being pronounced as bald as the *libretto* was uninteresting. Another novelty was likewise tried—Donizetti's opera buffa, *Don Gregorio*, under the title *L' Ajo nell' Imbarazzo*—but although supported by the talent of Mdme. Castellan, Mario, Fornisari, and Lablache, it was mercilessly condemned. Immediately after Easter, Grisi, Mario, and Lablache put in an appearance, and played

* See *Athenæum* for 1846, p. 208. Mdme. Pasini was afterwards known to the public as Mdme. Gassier.

in the most popular operas of Mr. Lumley's *répertoire* with their usual success, and with every manifestation of loyalty. Totally in opposition to Mr. Lumley's extravagant assurance, that "altogether the season of 1846 fully maintained the lofty prestige of Her Majesty's Theatre,"* the following severe but most thoroughly just criticism of the events of that season is much more to be relied upon: "Though the subscription had been raised, the company had been worse than usual. Three first-rate *artistes* were all that had been heard —Mdme. Grisi, Signori Mario and Lablache. The only operas which had been in the least satisfactory were those in which these *artistes* performed. The *Nino* of Verdi, it is true, was thrust forward repeatedly, whenever the first tenor was tired; but it did not attract, in part owing to the inferiority of the cast. *I Lombardi,* a weaker opera, was admitted to pass, thanks to the *prima donna* and *primo tenore.* Neither, however, will be in request for many seasons longer, since even the composer's *Ernani,* his best opera, could not be given again. *I Puritani,* the second act of *Lucrezia Borgia,* and *Anna Bolena* were the best performances. *Semiramide, Norma, Il Matrimonio,* and *Don Giovanni* were spoilt, owing to the absence of an efficient contralto and *seconda donna;* whilst Donnizetti's *L' Ajo nell' Imbarazzo* was so badly produced as to stand no chance of pleasing, had the works deserved to please. Now, in so discreditable an inferiority of corps for the dearest theatre in Europe, it is not possible to acquiesce in the often-urged plea that nothing better was to be procured. Since the opera troupe is *not* to be an Hesperian garden of beauties, the subscribers had a right to expect

* *Reminiscences of the Opera,* p. 151.

such ladies as Mesdames Persiani, Nina-Barbièri, Giuli-Borsi, and Tadolini—experienced *artistes* of reputation, in short—to divide first duties with Madame Grisi, as was the case formerly, when that lady, being younger, needed it less. Again, they had a right to look for such Adalgisas as Signori Molteni, Nissen, or Parodi, every *artiste* mentioned having been accessible on proper conditions. And it is nonsense to point to Signora Brambilla as the only contralto in the market, when, supposing *the* Brambilla to be no longer welcome to our public—which we deny—Madame Albertazzi, an accomplished singer, a beautiful woman, and a better actress, was here—without an engagement! There was less choice amongst the tenors, we are aware; but the public was entitled to demand *with* Signor Mario, either Signori Salvi, Moriani, or Guasco,—in short, a complete company, placing the evening's entertainment beyond the power of being spoiled by the indisposition of any one or two persons. As our strictures have been (in) no case of incoherent vituperation or prejudice without reason, but the result of a settled conviction that a disposition existed on the part of the management, upon false pretences, to give the cheapest and meanest article that could be endured, we are bound to 'speak by the card.' An inferior company, we repeat, was forced upon the subscribers, while the orchestra had fallen away from its old perfection. The military band on the stage, whenever employed, was of worse quality than that engaged in better seasons—the chorus allowed to bawl and sing carelessly; facts which we defy any opera-goer to disprove, and which are mentioned with regret and vexation by every *artiste* and subscriber with whom we have spoken. The opera trumpeters will possibly cite, in

answer to such unflattering truths, 'columns of praise,' 'peals of applause,' 'showers of bouquets,' &c., as proofs that we are malevolent, and that the public has really been content. All these signs of success were paraded, it is true, but the manufacture thereof is now pretty well understood. The system of articles sent, with boxes, to London editors; of circulars to the country papers; of anticipatory panegyrics upon such disastrous bargains as Miss Edwards, Signora Pasini, Signori Felix, Castigliano, Bencich, and others, were carried into effect so mercilessly, as, in part, to have wrought its own cure. It is known, now, whence the *encores* proceed. If even the gentlemen and ladies stationed in different parts of the theatre themselves made a secret of their honourable calling, they were as familiar to all frequenters of the opera as the prompter's box or conductor's *bâton*. On this point of 'discipline' we have hitherto been silent—from no want of information, but from unwillingness to refer to practices so degrading, when Art was the theme. In reviewing the opera and its apologists, however, we cannot pass over a fact which has stared every one in the face, as indicating that the present mismanagements, which are bringing a fine musical establishment to ruin, are not mere casual mistakes, but operations conducted on a steady system of deluding the public, by foisting on it trumpery for true metal."*

It will be remembered that by no one was the appointment of Mr. Costa as the musical director of the Philharmonic Concerts more positively denounced than by Mr. H. F. Chorley.† It may, therefore, not be considered out of place to record, in his own words, the change of opinion the very

* See *Athenæum* for 1846, pp. 869-70. † See above, p. 160.

first concert wrought upon him: "Without unnecessary words or exaggeration, it may be stated as past question, that the first Philharmonic Concert established Signor Costa in the foremost rank of conductors of classical music, and justified the directors in their choice. As we somewhat mistrusted the discretion of his appointment, it behoves us emphatically to say, that we have heard no Philharmonic performance to compare with Monday's (March 16th). The orchestra is entirely under the control of Signor Costa's *bâton*, and the difference of such a discipline made itself felt ere Haydn's simple old Symphony in B flat, No. 9, had been played. We felt conscious of an alertness and a submissiveness, a delicacy and a spirit new to the Hanover-square Rooms; of a near approach to the highest continental style of finish, such as is produced at Leipsic under Mendelssohn, and at Paris under Habeneck. To assert that Signor Costa understands the duties of his office better than some of his predecessors, would be an absurd no less than an 'odious' comparison; but there can be no mistake as to his success in the carrying of good purposes into effect; and none, we believe, whether of old England or young England, *Philo*-Germans or *Philo*-Gauls, will dispute the fact. Then, to ourselves, who were not convinced by the experiments at the Opera last year of Signor Costa's due sympathy for great German compositions, it was agreeable to remark a much freer and more expressive handling of the music than we had expected—an increase of temperance, there being merely one or two *sforzandi* a little over-loud, for future experience to correct; and all this without the slightest sacrifice of intelligence or animation. So splendid was the effect of the *Oberon* overture, that an uproarious *encore* was

inevitable. The *Eroica* Symphony, too, was a noble performance. In all the movements, the inner parts came out with a readiness of reply and clearness of delivery which went far to fill up the finest conceptions of the composition. The first *allegro* was taken a little more moderately than usual; and the delicacy of its second subject was another approach made by the band to the required sensitiveness. The slight *rallentando*, as we are explicitly informed by Herr Schindler, one of the effects insisted upon by the composer, was brought about with the utmost nicety. The impressiveness of the March was attested by the breathless silence of the audience. Farther, it is new for us to chronicle such finish in accompaniment as distinguished the Philharmonic band on Monday."*

Although my own opinion in no degree whatever had coincided with that of Mr. H. F. Chorley, that Mr. Costa's nomination to the musical direction of the Philharmonic Society's concerts was "the first step towards making those concerts a dependency on the Opera House," and that "the only result of such a proceeding would inevitably be outrageously unpopular," † I must confess that I had some misgivings whether he would prove himself to be as fully equal to conduct the music of greater "masters" than had called for his superintendence and guidance for so many previous years in the Haymarket. I knew, however, that whatever patience, study, and intelligence could effect would be very speedily forthcoming at these concerts; but no more than Mr. H. F. Chorley had I anticipated that the former would have so decidedly marked his influence and power for improvement of the highest character. Till then I had no idea of what the *Eroica* Symphony was

* See *Athenæum* for 1846, p. 298. † See above, p. 160.

capable of being proved. There was no new reading according to Italian notions, but merely a strict attention to the directions of the score, and for the first time at these concerts was a *pianissimo* heard. The labour Mr. Costa had to effect this was immense, and this was increased by the rehearsals being almost as well attended by the friends of the directors and subscribers as the evening performances, which prevented the frequent repetition of passages to make them "go" as the composers had intended. Mr. Costa at once saw that, unless this system were broken down, he would have very little prospect of effecting that nicety of performance which he insisted upon as absolutely indispensable; but, not without some difficulty with the directors, and in the teeth of great opposition and indignation on the part of those who claimed their right to be present both at rehearsals and concerts, he carried his point—the immediate result of which was that the success of the first concert went on increasing, and those whose opinion was worth having rejoiced at the results of the change. From concert to concert during this year—and I was present at nearly all of them—the improvement that had been brought about went on steadily progressing, so that it would have been out of the question—as some desired—to revert to the old system, which had its partizans and admirers amongst not a few of the senior and displaced managers. Mr. Costa had, furthermore, discovered that it was absolutely necessary to weed out several of the older members of the band, especially amongst the wind instrumentalists; and this gave enormous offence, although in no single instance was it to be said that changes were made out of caprice, or upon any other ground than that of positive inefficiency. At the fourth concert Beethoven's

Missa Solennis may be said to have been really heard for the first time in England; and the effects were so remarkable, that his former detractor could not refrain from saying that "he hardly knew how sufficiently to emphasize his praise of Signor Costa, for his perfect command over a work so full of difficulties, and the manner in which, for a first exhibition, he had contrived to penetrate all concerned with his intentions," and required that it should "be remembered that the new conductor's case was not that of a German master directing German singers, who had all their choral lives been nibbling at separate portions of the work, but (of) an Italian *maestro*, called upon to beat the comprehension of its novelties into the overwrought and ill-paid music manufactures of a London season."* The result of the important changes which Mr. Costa had been able to effect manifested itself in so considerable an increase of the funds of the Society, that not only did the directors set about increasing the salaries of the band and principal singers, but they presented him with a piece of plate—"well merited," upon Mr. H. F. Chorley's admission, "by his success in raising these entertainments into something like their old animation and musical prominence."†

No record of the "Musical Recollections" of this year would be complete without some reference to the first performance of Mendelssohn's oratorio, *Elijah*, at the Birmingham Festival, on Wednesday morning, August 26th. Having gone thither expressly for that performance—one, on every account, calculated to excite more than ordinary interest—I can speak not only of the impression it made upon the general public, but of the manner in which it was performed. Fastidious even

* See *Athenæum* for 1846, p. 484. † Id. p. 690.

to a fault about everything he wrote, Mendelssohn did not leave his work as it was given on its first performance, but altered several "numbers," re-wrote others, and added to and improved the instrumentation of the score in various directions. Concerning a work now quite as well known as Handel's *Messiah*, and second only perhaps in public estimation to that highly important oratorio, it is needless here to give a *résumé* of its various points of excellence, both as regards the consecutive nature of the circumstances connected with the prophet's life and career, or to enter at any length on the various vocal and instrumental means adopted for their descriptive elucidation. Neither would it be either useful or profitable to refer to the differences of opinion that were, and still are, expressed as to whether it is inferior or superior to the same composer's *St. Paul*. Whilst educated musicians maintain the former opinion, public estimation will decidedly prefer the latter, chiefly because of "the book" being of more interesting construction, and of the music being almost wholly descriptive, as in many instances also exceedingly dramatic, so much so, indeed, that it is said in Germany that it may some day or other be adapted to the stage—a result not at all beyond the limits of possibility, since the celebrated Bavarian Ammergau play has served to remove many of the objections to the transfer of Scriptural subjects from the concert-room to the theatre; and assuredly the import of that play is by many and many a degree more sacred than the history of the prophet Elijah ever can be considered. One remarkable feature of this oratorio—the holiness in its tone—seized at once upon the Birmingham audience, and has been increased on every occasion of its being repeated either in London or the provinces;

but perhaps never was it more so than when I heard it within the massive walls of the cathedral of Worcester, at the autumn Musical Festival of 1854, on which occasion the first part was illustrated by Madame Castellan and Signor Gardoni, and the second by Mesdames Clara Novello, Viardot, Miss Dolby, and Mr. Sims Reeves, the *rôle* of the prophet throughout having been intrusted to Herr Formes, who had not then lost his voice, and was second only to Staudigl, who had the honour and privilege of "creating" it. Throughout the whole of the grand part of the prophet, as especially in the series of the choruses, there is a strength of grasp and a freshness of imagination which indicates how absorbed Mendelssohn had been with his subject, and attests his willing assent and happy resort to all those rules and conditions which help to bring about the highest and most literal rules and conditions both of art and science. Even although the *Elijah* had not the advantage of the best *artistes* that might have been selected for its "creation" at Birmingham, with the exception of Staudigl, its own intrinsic merits carried it triumphantly through, the fact being on all hands perceived how transcendent it would become when enjoying the advantage of more highly competent and finished interpretation. Not only was Madame Caradori-Allen, who sang the soprano part, passing off from the scene of her former triumphs, but the music laid higher than she could sing with comfort to herself. The contralto portion was even less suited to Miss M. Hawes, who, although a skilled musician, did not possess a voice of sufficient power and compass to enable her to deliver the several "numbers" intrusted to her with due effect and precision—especially Jezebel's declamatory denunciation of the prophet, which no one but

Madame Viardot ever made thoroughly effective. Miss M. Hawes' comprehension of the composer's intention was, for the most part, just; but her *physique*, which she could not control, was almost entirely at fault. Never perhaps has the music that Mendelssohn had given to the tenor been better sung than it was by Mr. Lockey, who was then coming forward, and substantiating the claim he was making to be called our first English vocalist in the line of oratorio performances. The inner parts, if they may be so designated, were well and ably sustained by the Misses Williams and Bassano and Messrs. Hobbs, Phillips, and Machin; but that I shall ever again hear the part of Elijah so magnificently rendered as it was by Staudigl is not probable. His voice, which during the previous London season had shown symptoms of decay, seemed to have entirely recovered its former tone, and he sang with the care and impressiveness of one who liked—because he felt—his part. The orchestra was throughout zealous and attentive to Mendelssohn's direction; and the chorus was, upon the whole, excellent, the freshness of the female voices especially telling to the utmost advantage in the grand and thrilling finale of the first part, "Thanks be to God—He laveth the thirsty land"—one of the most marvellously characteristic specimens of descriptive writing that was ever imagined and worked at.

The year 1847 will ever remain memorable in the "Musical Recollections of the last half-century," by the establishment of a second opera-house,* in opposition to Her Majesty's Theatre;

* Signori Persiani (husband of the *prima donna*) and Galetti were the promoters of the scheme, the basis and working of which were the conception of an amateur (Mr. C. L. Grunaisen), the musical critic of the "Morning Chronicle" in 1847.

an event, to the probability of whose accomplishment reference has already been made.* On Tuesday, April 6, the new venture commenced with such an *ensemble* as had certainly never been gathered before, not even in the palmiest days of Italian opera, in this country. Not only had Mr. Lumley been wholly successful in the one object of his management of Her Majesty's Theatre—the breaking up of *la vieille garde*, not one of whom, except Lablache, remained with him—but he had so acted as to induce *artistes*, whom no one could have ever supposed would have consented, to work together with a unanimity and a goodwill which, although in some respects occasionally interrupted, held fast to one settled purpose—that of indicating to the world that they were not to be "bought and sold" according to the whim and the caprice of any manager.

The composition of the members of the Royal Italian Opera, assembled at Covent Garden—the original home of the Kembles had been almost entirely rebuilt, and fitted for operatic performances on the largest scale by M. Albano, regardless, as the saying is, of expense—was so remarkable, that it must be in its entirety recorded. The leading *prime donne* were Mdmes. Grisi, Persiani, Ronconi, and Mdlle. Steffanoni; Mdlle. Corbari was the *seconda donna;* Mdlle. Alboni† the contralto—the grandest *artiste* in this department that had ever been heard in London,

* See above, p. 173.

† Alboni (Marietta) was born in 1823 at Cesena, a small village of the Romagna, where she commenced her musical studies, being afterwards transferred to Bologna, where she was placed under Mdme. Bertoletti, "a professor of merit." Here this thoroughly accomplished *artiste* obtained the attention and consideration of Rossini, who, to the end of his life, took the warmest interest in her. She made her first appearance on the stage at the Scala, Milan, in 1843, in the *rôle* of Orsini in the *Lucrezia Borgia*, and was at once accepted, for the beauty of her voice, with the utmost enthusiasm. After sing-

to whom the refusal of an engagement at Her Majesty's Theatre had been persisted in with the utmost obstinacy—Signori Mario and Salvi,* tenors, with three assistants of secondary repute; Signori Tamburini, Ronconi, Marini, and Rovere (buffo), Tagliafico, Polonini, and another gentleman as baritones and *bassi profundi*. Mr. Costa, who undertook the entire musical direction, presided over an orchestra of picked players, consisting of the best English and foreign professionals, and pronounced to be "unquestionably the best ever assembled in England."† Mr. Frederick Beale,‡ in conjunction with Mr. Robertson, the treasurer of the old Covent Garden Theatre, attended to the business transactions and arrangements before the curtain.

Having "assisted" at the first performance within the walls of the new Royal Italian Opera House at the representation of Rossini's *Semiramide*, with Grisi as the heroine, Alboni as

ing in the same year at Bologna, Brescia, and again at Milan, she went to Vienna, and was there most warmly received. On account of a dispute with the director of the Italian Theatre in the Austrian capital, she broke her engagement, and went to St. Petersburg, only to meet with disappointment as to her success. She was next heard of at the close of 1845 at Hamburg, then at Leipsic, Dresden, &c. She was at Rome for the carnival in the spring of 1847; which she left for London, where that reputation, which never declined, may be said to have been made. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. i. p. 51.

* Salvi (Lorenzo) was born at Bergamo about the year 1812, and débuted at Rome in 1832. From 1834 to 1839 he sang at the San Carlo Theatre, Naples, when he went to Vienna, Padua, Venice, and Bergamo. During 1844-46 he sang at Moscow and St. Petersburg, and appeared in London in 1847, being engaged in the following year at Les Italiens, Paris. In 1851 he returned to Italy, and retired from his profession. Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. vii. p. 388.

† See *Athenæum* for 1847, p. 394.

‡ Mr. Frederick Beale was appointed director at the last moment, after Mr. John Mitchell, so long connected with the management of the French plays, had declined the position.

Arsace, Tamburini as Assur, Lavia as Idreno, and Tagliafico as Oroe, I am prepared to indorse the opinion on all hands expressed—that no such presentation of that opera had ever before been witnessed in London. Not only were the principal singers all that—and more than—might have been required, but the *mise en scène* could scarcely have been surpassed. Entirely satisfactory, however, as was the performance in each of these respects, to all lovers of art, the spirit and brilliancy of the concerted music was its most acceptable feature. The chorus was clear, ready, and powerful; so that there was no word of exaggeration in the statement that "the general *ensemble*, as promised in the programme, was something never heretofore attained by any Italian performance in this country."*

The *Semiramide* was followed by Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, with Mdmes. Persiani, Salvi, and Ronconi in the principal characters;—by *La Sonnambula*, in which Mario joined Mdme. Persiani and Tamburini;—by Rossini's long-laid-aside buffo opera, *L'Italiana in Algieri*, by means of which Marini and Rovere made the acquaintance of the British public, Mdlle. Alboni and Signor Salvi supporting the other characters;—by Donizetti's *Maria de Rohan*, in which Mdme. Ronconi attempted the heroine, and failed again as miserably as she had done on a former occasion at Her Majesty's Theatre;† so much so indeed, that she had to resign the part to Grisi, after she had perilled the success of Mdlle. Alboni and her husband;—by *Lucrezia Borgia*, with Grisi, Alboni, Mario, and Tamburini as the cast;—by *Il Don Giovanni*, Tamburini being the hero; Rovere, Leporello; Mdlle. Corbari, Elvira; Mdme. Persiani, Zerlina; and Grisi, Donna Anna;—by *I Puritani*,

* See *Athenæum* for 1847, p. 394. † See above, p. 134.

with Marini in Lablache's celebrated part;—by *Il Barbiere*, the acting and singing combination consisting of Mdme. Persiani as Rosina; Salvi as Almaviva; Rovere as Bartolo; Marini, as Basilio; and Ronconi as Figaro;—by *I Due Foscari*, with Grisi, Mario, and Ronconi;—by *Ernani*, with Mdlle. Steffanoni as the heroine; and Alboni as Carlo V., instead of Tamburini or Ronconi, for whom the music was too low;—by *Anna Bolena*, including Grisi, Alboni, Corbari, Mario, and Tamburini in the cast;—by *Le Nozze di Figaro*, Marini being the Figaro; Rovere, Bartolo; Lavia, Basilio; Tamburini, the Count; Alboni, Cherubino; Steffanoni, La Contessa; and Grisi, Susanna;—by *La Gazza Ladra*, with Grisi as Ninetta; Alboni, Pippo; Marini, the Podesta—a mistake, with Ronconi in the theatre; Tamburini as Ferdinando; and Salvi as Giannetto;—and by *La Donna del Lago* as the last event of the season, truly a *bonne bouche*, admirably mounted, and splendidly played and sung by Grisi, Alboni, Mario, Marini, and Bettini.

To any one following out the details of the first Royal Italian Opera season's "doings," it will be conclusive that no effort was wanting on the part of all engaged in the arduous undertaking to secure a prestige which would defy competition. Knowing what the several *artistes* were who were thus engaged, it may seem somewhat unnecessary to specify any of those performances as having been exceptionally excellent. Nevertheless, there were one or two so thoroughly remarkable in their character for unwonted excellence, that it would be unjust to omit a notice concerning them. By far the most important of them all was that of Donizetti's comparatively weak *Maria di Rohan*, in which Ronconi startled the public by his subtle and fearfully tragic portrait of the character of Chevreuse,

wherein the courtly nobleman's breeding gave by its very polish the crowning agony to doubt, jealousy, and vengeance. Nothing higher than Ronconi's representation of these passions in point of art and nature was ever witnessed. "The manner in which he compelled the faithless wife to be seated, the withering scorn of his irony, the vehemence of suppressed fury with which he delivered the words,

'Sull' uscio tormendo lo sguardo figgiamo,'

and his look and gesture when Chalais appeared on the threshold of the secret door, were paragoned on the Italian opera stage only by some of Pasta's most memorable passages, or of those touches by which Lablache retained his hold of his audiences. It was curious to observe how the audience, at first careless if not disdainful, because of the inequality of the libretto and the triviality of the music, became wrought up to attention and enthusiasm." Ronconi's Chevreuse was indeed a masterpiece of histrionic power, that never was excelled by a Kemble, a Kean, or even a Garcia. Mdlle. Alboni's personation and singing in the comparatively trifling part of De Gonde, could also but be universally admired. The next interesting performance which may not remain unnoticed was that of Rossini's *L'Italiana in Algieri*, because of its having introduced two new competitors for fame to the British public, Signori Marini and Rovere, the former of whom became one of the most useful members of the Royal Italian Opera corps, whilst the latter was a buffo-singer of considerable pretension; but because of his not being either a Lablache or a Ronconi, he failed to make a lasting impression. He was generally considered to be too fussy and restless in his manner, whilst his fun was

certainly of the driest that could well be conceived. The last novelty of the season, the revival of Rossini's *La Donna del Lago*, was also a most important event; but it came too late in the season to claim all the consideration it merited, although it was in its fitting place to "cap the climax" of a season which, if not so profitable in a pecuniary sense as the Royal Italian Opera Company and its patrons could have desired, yet made an entirely new sensation as to what the nature of operatic performances ought to be, and might be. The venture had been a bold one, yet it had been so vigorously carried out, that its future could but be altogether hopeful and promising. The only *artiste* who failed to make an impression was Mdlle. Steffanoni; but she had no fair chance of showing what her qualities really were, since the music of *Ernani* was much too exhausting for her powers to withstand, and her personation of the Countess in *Le Nozze di Figaro* did not serve to improve her position, although she deserved credit for her firm but somewhat mechanical execution of the music of that never very warmly esteemed part.

Although greatly "staggered" by the stampede of all his *artistes*, with the exception of Lablache, before which many another man would have immediately succumbed, Mr. Lumley set manfully to work to repair the deficiencies this secession had occasioned, and was early in the field with promises for the forthcoming season of new engagements of more or less importance. His treaty with Mdme. Castellan, on which he greatly relied, was confirmed; and to that lady were added Mdlles. Montenegro and Sanchioli as *soprani*, and Mdlle. Vietti as *contralto assoluto*. For principal tenors he secured Fraschini as his *tenore robusto*, an *artiste* of large Italian repute, and

Gardoni, "young, handsome, gifted with a lovely voice, and belonging to a good school"—one who had been fought for by rival *impresarii* in Italy and France, and whose liberty he had recently purchased from the Grand Opéra of Paris for the sum of 60,000 francs (!);* whilst for *bassi* he was able to rely on Coletti, Superchi, Staudigl, Bouché, and Lablache. Although last, not least, Jenny Lind was promised to make her appearance after Easter, notwithstanding that the length of her engagement was not specified, and that her coming was retarded till very late in the season because of litigation between herself, Mr. Lumley, and Mr. Bunn, the latter the manager of Drury Lane Theatre, who, she averred, had entrapped her into making a bargain with him. Mr. Lumley's object in obtaining the services of Mdlle. Lind, as after-events proved, was to play-off the old and invidious "star" system against the *ensemble* of the Royal Italian Opera; and he was wise in his generation, for without such assistance as that lady rendered him, he would doubtless have had to close Her Majesty's Theatre sooner than that event actually occurred. "Thus," Mr. Lumley himself says, "amidst unusual discussion, turmoil, and agitation, the season of 1847 at length commenced on Tuesday, the 16th of February, with Donizetti's opera *La Favorita*, which, although not entirely new to England, portions having already been performed, both in French and English, in London, was new to the Italian boards.† Gardoni proved a great success; and Superchi, as well as M. Bouché—a new bass not named in the original prospectus—were favourably received; but Mdlle. Sanchioli by no means improved in popular estimation, though she had

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 171. † Id. p. 172.

toned down her exuberance of passionate declamation, which had been but too apparent in the previous season.* Coletti and Fraschini were also favourably received; but the cry for Jenny Lind was again and again repeated by the public, the general impression being that—like the girl in one of the elder Charles Mathews's patter-songs—"the more they called, the more she wouldn't come." However, on Tuesday, the 4th of May, all the difficulties with Mr. Bunn—who had recovered from Jenny Lind (Feb. 22) £2500 damages in the Court of Queen's Bench, which were, by a compromise, afterwards reduced—as also about the Lord Chamberlain's licence for Meyerbeer's *Roberto il Diavolo* being overcome, the long-looked-for event came off, and caused a *furore* never likely to be forgotten by any one who, like myself, had to undergo "the crush" of getting within the auditorium of Her Majesty's Theatre. The public at once went mad about the Swedish *prima donna*, with whom I must confess to have been greatly disappointed—a feeling I was never able to overcome during the whole period of her career, more on account of the fact—the cause of which was doubtless with myself rather than with her—that to my ear she invariably sang somewhat sharp, and that I could by no means consider any *prima donna* to be a great *artiste* who was only positively successful in four operas—*Roberto*, *La Sonnambula*, *La Figlia del Reggimento*, and *Le Nozze di Figaro*, her Norma having been a complete failure. A far more interesting *début*, to my mind, on the night of Jenny Lind's first appearance, was that of Staudigl, who imparted an influence to the character of Bertramo such as had never before and never since has

* See above, pp. 173-4.

been witnessed. Nevertheless, he failed to realise the good opinion he richly merited.

For some time previously to the commencement of Her Majesty's Theatre season, Mr. Lumley had been in treaty with Verdi for an opera on the subject of *King Lear;* but that composer, having failed to fulfil his contract, offered his *I Masnadieri,* a work founded on Schiller's "Die Räuber," which Mr. Lumley willingly accepted, because Mdlle. Lind had consented "to appear, for the second time only in her career, in a thoroughly original part composed expressly for her."* This opera was, therefore, given on Thursday, July 2nd, being supported by the combined talent of Lablache, Gardoni, Coletti, Bouché, and, above all, Jenny Lind; it being, in fact, the only work in which that lady had appeared wherein the cast was worthy of the palmy reputation she enjoyed. *I Masnadieri,* however, turned out a miserable failure, as it deserved to do, since it could but at all events, as was rightly said, "increase Signor Verdi's discredit with every one who had an ear," and was decidedly the worst opera that was ever given at Her Majesty's Theatre, the music being in every respect inferior even to that of *I Due Foscari.*

Of the season itself it was but too truthfully said at its close, that it had consisted "of a series of performances unexampled in brilliancy as regarded the sensation excited by a single *artiste,* but of a badness unexampled—since 1834—as regarded musical execution. To characterise it in brief, it should be referred to as the year of "the Lind fever," of Signor Gardoni's *début,* of Signor Coletti's success, and of inferior operatic performances. Even the *ballet,* which had been rich in point of names, had

* *Reminiscences of the Opera,* p. 192.

been meagre in point of attraction ever since Easter, and, indeed, alike disregarded by manager and public." *

At the first Philharmonic Concert of this year, which began with all the *éclat* with which that of the previous season had terminated, Miss Kate Loder (Lady Henry Thompson)—a relative of the celebrated musical family of the same name at Bath—played Weber's Pianoforte Concerto in E flat with a thorough master's hand, showing, indeed, that she was very far in advance of being a mere scholar, or one of those clever young ladies who do but little honour to their instructors, and less to their own ambition. The good promise which this *début* put forward was largely fulfilled in after-years, during which Miss Kate Loder ascended to the very summit of her profession as a native pianist of the highest mark that had been reached in modern times. M. Sainton also played Mendelsshon's violin solo with much grace and brilliancy of execution. The fourth concert comprised a successful presentation of Mendelssohn's works. Indeed, it might aptly have been called a "Mendelssohn Festival," since not only did that composer play his pianoforte concerto in G, but he himself conducted his A minor Symphony, and the *Midsummer Night's Dream* music, before an enthusiastic audience, including the Queen, Prince Albert, and other members of the Royal Family. At the fifth concert Joachim played Beethoven's violin concerto with increased success; and at the sixth Vieuxtemps introduced one of his own, only remarkable for its length, the time occupied being nearly a whole hour, so that when Spohr's *Die Weihe der Töne*—"The Power—or Consecration—or Inauguration —of Sound"—Symphony came to be performed, the audience

* See *Athenæum* for 1847, p. 845.

were in no fit condition to listen to it. At the concluding concert, De Beriot's Third Violin Concerto was played by Herr Helmesberger, but produced no especial marks of recognition.

The season thus closed was profitable, brilliant, and satisfactory—to the silencing of cavillers, and to the vindication of the directors "in having intrusted the orchestral management wholly to Mr. Costa."

The well-deserved approbation of the public, which the Royal Italian Opera Company had won in 1847, induced those who had the management the next year to use their utmost effort to bring together even a stronger company, with the disposition to work harmoniously for the advancement of art, more than for their own individual advantage. So early as the latter end of January the programme was issued, in which, in addition to the names that had become familiar, those of Madame Castellan—who seceded from Her Majesty's Theatre—and Madame Viardot-Garcia were announced. Against these Mr. Lumley pitted Mdlles. Jenny Lind, Moltini,* Vera, and Cruvelli,† with Mesdames Tadolini ‡ and Abbadia as *prime*

* See above, pp. 131, 134.

† Cruvelli (Jeanne Sophie Charlotte), Countess Vigier, was born March 1826, at Bielefeld, Prussian Westphalia, her father being a tobacco-merchant and trombone-player. Her mother, *née* Scheer, was a contralto singer of some repute in her time, and was her chief instructor. She *débuted* at Venice in 1847, and came to London, as will be seen by the text, in 1848. Having gone through many of the continental capitals, she concluded her career at Paris in 1855. See Fetis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. ii. pp. 401-2.

‡ Tadolini (Eugénie) was born in 1809 at Forli, in Upper Roumagna, and was taught by Farni and Grilli, and married the latter. She *débuted* at Parma, in 1829, and then went to "Les Italiens," Paris. Returning to Italy, she sang in most of the principal cities of that country till 1841, and was frequently heard at Vienna between 1841 and 1847, where she seems to have been always a great favourite. Ib. tom. viii. pp. 173-4.

donne; Mdlle. Schwartz, from Vienna, as contralto; Signori Cuzzani and Labocetta, in addition to Gardoni, as tenors; and Signor Beletti, who, as a new basso, was to make an impression that would become permanent. Worried by the indecision of Jenny Lind as to when she would appear, or whether she would even come at all, an engagement, upon the advice of Rubini, was offered Mdlle. Sophie Cruvelli, whom Mr. Lumley secured, after having heard her in the autumn of 1847 at Rovigo, a somewhat dull and uninteresting town in Northern Italy, as the only lady on whom he had any hope of reliance, in the event of his friends and himself being disappointed by the greater favourite. That the forthcoming competition between the two houses was to be a regular "Montagu and Capulet" affair was thus at once pronounced, and truly enough London had never witnessed anything so intensely exciting in the history of Italian operatic doings.

As the older house managed to get the start of its formidable rival by opening on Saturday, Feb. 19th, it shall have precedence in the account of such of its events as are within the compass of my memory. The opera by means of which this season was inaugurated was Verdi's *Ernani*, Mdlle. Cruvelli having arrived sufficiently early in town to try her fortune in that most uninteresting operatic melodrama with Signori Cuzzani and Beletti. The youth, handsome face, and elegant figure of the lady won the favour of her audience on her appearance, and their good opinion was secured on the instant by her delivery of the well-known and already well-worn *aria d'entrata*, "Ernani, involami;" for the delivery of her voice was good, and her execution, with the exception of her shake, which was loose and uneven, promising. Her powers

came out better in the concerted "numbers" than in the solos, and in the final *terzetto* "she gave signs of dramatic passion, which, though erring on the side of extravagance, exhibited a feeling for the stage worthy of careful training." Upon the whole, a more satisfactory *début* had not been for several seasons witnessed. Signor Cuzzani made no favourable impression whatever, his voice being as dreary as his manner was cold and constrained; but Signor Beletti was recognised immediately as a decided acquisition, and his success, as it deserved to be, was complete. His voice was found to be sufficiently powerful, tunable, and well trained, and his stage manner free from exaggeration. As for the orchestra, it was by many degrees worse than that of the previous year, being weaker in the strings, coarser in the contrebassi, and noisier in its brass instruments. The chorus was also rough and imperfect, and Mr. Balfe's beat more indecisive than ever. The opera itself was also cut down from four to three acts by omissions which lessened the amount of tediousness—small enough, in all conscience—it originally possessed. *Ernani* was speedily followed by *Il Barbiere*, the new *prima donna* appearing as Rosina—for which she was entirely unsuited—with Gardoni as Almaviva. Beletti was the Figaro; but about the demands of that sparkling part he seemed to have no idea whatever. F. Lablache attempted his father's character—Dr. Bartolo. He had not, however, inherited either the talent or the spirit of his great progenitor, and thus made nothing whatever but a *fiasco* out of it.

Another opera of Verdi's, his *Attila*, was brought out on Tuesday, March 14; but although Cruvelli, Gardoni, Beletti, and Cuzzani were included in the cast, it made not the

slightest impression. The public would have "none of it." The libretto, no less than the music, was simply detestable. This was but a bad beginning, and the revival of the same composer's somewhat better, but now terribly stale, *I Due Foscari* and *Nabucco* did not assist in mending it. The new singer, Madame Abbadia, utterly failed, and Mdlle. Vera could scarcely be said to have done much better. All this happened before Easter. Then *Lucrezia Borgia* was brought forward, chiefly for Mdlle. Schwartz, the new contralto, although Mdlle. Cruvelli undertook, with more energy than discretion, to become the rival of Grisi in her grandest personation. Lablache was the Duke, and Gardoni Gennaro, so that Donizetti did not altogether fare badly in such hands. The new contralto was, however, "nowhere." Even had she been better than she proved to be, it would have been impossible for her to have "made headway" against Alboni, who had taken the part of Orsini at the other house decidedly for her own. On Good Friday, April 21st, the all-popular Jenny Lind arrived in London, but refused to appear—Mr. Lumley asserts—on account of the natural tendency of her Scandinavian temperament to believe in occult influences ! *

It was, therefore, indeed most opportune that there was Mdlle. Cruvelli to fall back upon, since without her aid, talent, and loyalty it would have been almost impossible to have kept the doors of Her Majesty's Theatre open. As it was, combined with the failure of the new tenor, Signor Labocetta, in *Il Barbiere*, the attendance of the warmest *habitués* became nightly less and less. Thursday, May 4th, witnessed a repetition of all the excitement of the previous

* See *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 217.

year, whenever Jenny Lind appeared. Mr. Lumley has graphically, but by no means untruly, described the scene in the Haymarket on that memorable night: "Again were struggling crowds early at the doors; again were hats doubled up and dresses torn; and again was the throng of carriages, the clamour and conflict of coachmen, servants, policemen, mob, the same as of yore; for the adored (Swedish) *prima donna* was to make her re-appearance in the part which, more than all, had fascinated her enraptured admirers of the previous year, Amina, in *La Sonnambula*."* No louder praise could have been accorded to her performance generally by the press. But few of the London journals ventured to find the slightest fault; yet one at least amongst the then well-known staff of critics defied the opprobrium his honest dealing raised; for he said, truly enough, that "Mdlle. Lind's voice seemed to have gained in power, but also to have somewhat coarsened, since last year. Her execution, moreover, was more careless than it should have been. The chamber-scene—in which, by the way, the *soprano* had largely possessed herself of the tenor's part—was sung with too unmitigated a *forte*," which was generally the case; "the *largo*, 'Ah, non credea,' given with a sensible diminution of its former plaintive delicacy; and the *rondo*, 'Ah, non giunge,' more or less out of time throughout." Having delivered himself thus decidedly, the writer further ventured to express "a hope that these changes" in Mdlle. Lind's method "might be but passing ones, and that the bloom of so fresh and gracious a talent had not entirely gone. But, if Mdlle. Lind was to maintain her high popularity, her future career craved no ordinary capacity in shaping," and that he "waited

* See *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 218.

with some curiosity,"—he waited *in vain*,—"to see in what direction she intended further to extend her repertory during her second season," seeing that as yet "it virtually consisted of two operas—*La Sonnambula* and *La Figlia*—since *Robert* was beyond the immediate resources of the management, and *Norma* was an experiment which it would have been unwise to repeat."* It was not fated, however, that Mdlle. Lind should be heard either as Desdemona in Rossini's *Otello*, or as Ninetta in *La Gazza Ladra*, which had been talked of; for on Thursday, Aug. 24th, she appeared in *La Sonnambula* for the last time this season, having a few nights previously sung in *I Puritani*—which I did not hear, but which was understood to have been anything but a successful effort. Not many months afterwards she altogether retired from the stage, having been induced, as it was publicly asserted at the time, by Dr. Stanley, the then Bishop of Norwich, to abandon that "line" of her professional engagements.

The "Lind fever" had taken away all chance of any other *prima donna* being listened to, and was chiefly the cause of Madame Tadolini, who appeared in *Linda di Chamouni*, on Saturday, May 20th, making nothing else than a mere *succès d'estime*. The season was marked, however, by one other event that turned out to be the forerunner of importance,—the *début* of Mr. Sims Reeves in the same opera with Madame Tadolini; but he immediately quarrelled with Mr. Lumley and Mr. Balfe, and retired, Gardoni taking his place, not without advantage, as the two former, and many others besides, the public included, believed. *Don Pasquale* was afterwards presented for Madame Tadolini, but without at all reversing the

* See *Athenæum* for 1848, p. 468.

judgment passed upon her qualifications. Mdlle. Cruvelli alone, of the two *prime donne*, maintained her footing; whilst the other "set below the horizon of the London Italian stage at the end of the season, once and for ever."*

The season of the Royal Italian Opera did not begin until Thursday, March 13th, when a somewhat unsatisfactory version of *Tancredi* was given, with Madame Persiani as the heroine, and Alboni in the title *rôle*. Great expectations were formed of the latter lady's version of Pasta's great part, and the disappointment it caused was proportionate. Had not the great contralto made an impression in the previous year that could not easily have been removed, she never would have been accepted for her Tancredi. Whatever was the cause, whether illness or indifference, she went through the part "as if under the effect of an opiate, singing languidly, almost lifelessly, and seldom with more than a *mezza voce*." Madame Persiani somewhat made up for Mdlle. Alboni's want of warmth and energy; but the opera was similar to what Shakspeare's *Hamlet* might be supposed to be either without the Prince of Denmark, or with some one who merely read without acting the part. Then Signor Mei, who undertook the tenor *rôle* of Argiro, was altogether an inefficient singer and actor, and Polonini as Orbazzano was nothing more than sufficient. Every one left the house that night disappointed and anticipating the worst for the coming season, so easily may the public be depressed. Nothing of any note requires to be recorded, the appearance of M. Roger† as Edgardo, and

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 225.

† Roger (Gustave Hippolyte), the son of a notary, was born Dec. 17, 1815, at St. Denis, and was destined by his uncle for his father's profession, that

Signor Corradi-Setti as Enrico,—and whose names had not been announced in the original programme,—being excepted, who supported Madame Castellan in a performance of the *Lucia di Lammermoor* until the *entrée* of Madame Viardot, Tuesday, May 9th, in *La Sonnambula*.

A more cruel method of treatment than that resorted to towards that lady has rarely been adopted. The fact was that Grisi had been influenced by a sudden fit of jealousy and fear lest Malibran's only sister should achieve a success. Mario was to have been the lover; but at the last moment that wretched "stick," who answered to the name of Flavio,* was thrust into the part, as if on purpose to mar everything by means of his incompetency. When the time came for Madame Viardot to dress, nothing was ready for her, and each of the costumes she had to wear was actually pinned upon her by the dresser allotted to her. It was no wonder that the audience was cold throughout the performance. Disappointed at the absence of Mario, and feeling that an insult had been offered to themselves, rather than to the lady who had been placed in so trying a position, they seemed inclined to vent their mortification upon her, and nearly accomplished that which, without

relative having charged himself with his education, on the death of his parents when he was quite a child. From a very early age he showed a preference for music, and entered the Conservatoire, June 17, 1836, under MM. Martin and Morin. He made his first appearance on the stage in the Théatre de la Bourse, Feb. 16, 1838, whence he was speedily transferred to the Opera Comique. After ten years' fulfilment of the principal tenor business at that house, he was transferred to the Grand Opéra in 1848, and "created" the part of John of Leyden, in Meyerbeer's *Prophète*, April 16, 1849. Since that time he has sung in most of the theatres of Europe, and maintained an excellent reputation everywhere. See Fetis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. vii. pp. 293-4.

* See above, p. 110.

doubt, was intended to be—of set purpose—a dead failure. Again and again Madame Viardot rose to the occasion, especially in the chamber-scene, and moved the icy coldness of the house into something akin to warmth; but she bided her time, and when the moment came for the finale to be sung, "went in" with such pluck and determination "to win," that she produced a *furore* that never before had been witnessed in the new Covent Garden Opera-house—entirely defeating her opponents, but not thereby rendering them less malicious or vindictive. From that moment a spirit of rivalry was introduced into the new venture, out of which disastrous consequences afterwards arose; nor was Grisi satisfied until she had appropriated nearly all Mdme. Viardot's parts, in not one of which did she come within "a shadow of a shade" of the excellence of a lady, who was only her inferior with respect to voice, but who, as an *artiste* and a genius, towered above the more popular favourite with transcendent superiority. After this Mdme. Viardot was permitted to appear as Donna Anna in *Il Don Giovanni*. She also played Romeo in Bellini's weakest and poorest opera, *I Capuleti*, and gained largely in public favour; but the utmost perseverance was resorted to in order to crush her prospects of playing her greatest part, before she had "created" the Fides of *Le Prophète*—Valentine—in Meyerbeer's *Les Huguenots*. Again and again did she complain to her friends that never would she be allowed to let the British public know what she could do by means of that opera. And she was right in her view of the case; for never would she have been heard therein, nor would it have been at all presented, had not Mr. Gruneisen—who had been the most active and energetic instrument in getting the Royal Italian

Opera established—advised that, in the list of operas ready to be played which had to be submitted to Her Majesty on the occasion of the first Royal command the theatre received, *Les Huguenots* should be *first* mentioned, rightly discerning that, if it were so, it would of a certainty be selected. So it came to pass that Meyerbeer's truly grand opera was, for the first time, given in London, as it deserved to be, on Thursday, July 20th, to be received with the utmost enthusiasm, and to prove the means of saving the Covent Garden speculation again and again from ruin, which would have been inevitable, had there not been such a work, that never failed to draw large sums of money whenever the treasury needed replenishing—as it too often did in those days. The Valentine of Madame Viardot entirely justified the very high opinion of her dramatic powers, which her appearance in the other operas already named had raised. Her personation of that essentially delicate character was natural and impassioned, complete without pedantry, and riveting without extravagance, her resources seeming to increase with the severe calls that were made upon them. She was in excellent voice, and making the utmost of the difficult music; while her acting in the conspiracy-scene, and in the following duet and terzetto, was of the loftiest tragic excellence—fearfully, but always poetically, natural. Mario's Raoul, too, was, as a musical whole, the most satisfactory personation which had been witnessed since the days of Nourrit,* Duprez † not even excepted; whilst his acting, especially in the great duet of the fourth act, showed signs of histrionic power and intelligence, for the first time in

* See vol. i. p. 225. † Vol. i. p. 151.

his life, of which he had never been suspected; the fact being, that as Malibran had taught Mr. Templeton how to act,* so her sister had effected the same result with one possessed of similar deficiency of talent, which Grisi had not accomplished, and never could or would have done, from lack of intelligence, had the two sung and acted together till doomsday. Honour, however, must not be withheld from Mdme. Castellan, who was brilliant and effective as Marguerite; or from Alboni, as the Page, for whom Meyerbeer had written a most piquant aria and chorus, which have never since been laid aside by any one of those ladies, who have been deemed competent to succeed her. Great praise was also due to the Marcel, a part which precisely suited Marini, who followed his master, Raoul, like a faithful watch-dog, about the stage, and sang the music, especially the celebrated "Piff-paff" and the duet of the third act, like a true *artiste*. The two other leading parts, St. Bris and Nevers, were also admirably sustained by Tamburini and Tagliafico.

With every fresh presentation the enthusiasm respecting *Les Huguenots* increased; and in like proportion grew the jealousy which was raised against the heroine, only to display itself soon afterwards—I cannot exactly fix the date—in a most contemptible form, that happily was defeated. The occasion was Madame Viardot's benefit, when *Les Huguenots* was, naturally enough, put up for representation. On the morning of that day Madame Viardot was waited upon by a gentleman of great influence in the theatre, who had to convey to her the intelligence that Mario was too ill to sing at night, but that under such untoward cir-

* See vol. i. p. 320.

cumstances Madame Grisi would play the Norma *for her*, if that opera were substituted. Whilst requesting that Madame Grisi might be cordially thanked for her courtesy and friendly feeling, Madame Viardot inquired whether the costumes were ready for each opera, and being assured that they were, she added, "Do you not know that Roger is still in town! I will ask him to play Raoul; but if he cannot do so, let *Norma* be given; *only I shall play Norma!*" This was a clever specimen indeed of the *coûte que coûte*, or "Roland for an Oliver," and it told. Roger consented to appear, the chance, had he not been a friend of Madame Viardot, being too good a one to be lost; and in the duel "Septuor" he gained the first encore that had yet been obtained for the music of that eminently striking "number." Not knowing the Italian words, he had been compelled to sing in French, and in the great duet this could but have been a disadvantage. Madame Viardot, therefore, sent down to the copyist for the French score; and between whiles, whilst she was off the stage, and dressing, she committed the original text to memory, and on taking up her part in French at the moment of Raoul's emerging from his hiding-place after the great conspiracy-*ensemble*, so excited Roger that he threw his whole soul into the scene, which was then sung and played as it had not previously been witnessed, creating an immense *furore*, and a double "call," both for the Valentine and the Raoul. It is needless to say that Roger was never again permitted to appear as Raoul, neither did it happen that Mario was ever afterwards indisposed when *Les Huguenots* had to be repeated! The last novelty that was given this season was Rossini's *Guillaume Tell*, with Tamburini as the Swiss Liberator; but it was, in every sense, represented too late to

become successful; and so *Les Huguenots* was permitted to bear the palm of triumph that had legitimately been won.

Of the Philharmonic Society's proceedings during this year there is nothing to record, beyond the fact that, under Mr. Costa's continued direction, it kept its ground without producing novelties, either with reference to composition or any other proceedings, that require to be mentioned.

The Royal Italian Opera season of 1849 commenced with the defection of Mdlle. Alboni, who transferred her services to Her Majesty's Theatre, apparently without any compunction whatever. Mdlle. Alboni was succeeded by Mdlle. Meric,* and afterwards by Mdlle. Angri, each of whom would have been considered competent for the position of contralto, had they not followed so great a favourite as that lady had generally made herself. And yet she had to endure the fate of almost every singer, whose line, because of the compass of their voice, has never become sufficiently popular to command the imaginary advantages of the "star" system. An English soprano, Miss Catherine Hayes, was added to the company, and did good service during the season; but, chiefly because of her "native growth," she did not receive the attention or consideration to which her talents entitled her. The business of the season opened with such a performance of Auber's *Masaniello* (*La Muette di Portici*) as had never been before witnessed in this country, and with so perfect a *mise en scène* and other fitting details as to have secured a popularity which has scarcely yet vanished. Mario undertook the part of Masaniello, which he looked, played, and sang admirably;

* The daughter of Madame de Meric-Lelande. See vol. i. p. 182.

whilst M. Massol, transferred from the Paris Grand Opéra, made the best Pietro ever seen, as he was when he "created" the part, and as he ever afterwards remained. Madame Dorus-Gras* was the heroine, but although careful and brilliant in Auber's showy music, did little or nothing to win that esteem which she had so often tried to gain in England, but without the same success she had met with in her own country.

Signor Mei made quite as much of the part of Alfonso as could be expected from either it or him; but the chief charm of this opera was derived from the admirable manner in which it was mounted, as well as from the ability manifested, down to the smallest of small boys, in the grouping of the stirring scenes and details of this highly characteristic work. As during the continuance of the season the *répertoire*, which had been increased in 1848, was drawn upon to great advantage, it is scarcely needful to say any more of it than that the same attention to every matter, small and great, as heretofore, still kept public attention awake to the benefit of *ensemble*, and led hopes to be entertained that it would gradually become completely triumphant—a hope by no means realised, as a few years served only too positively to proclaim. As Madame Viardot was unable to arrive in the early part of the season, because of her engagement at the Paris Grand Opéra, and as *Les Huguenots* was much asked for, and much needed "to bring grist to the mill," Madame Grisi gladly seized the opportunity of appropriating the part of Valentine, and of ever afterwards retaining it. It cannot be denied that her personation and singing the music of that part manifested the versatility of her talent, as well as the abundance of the gifts with which

* See vol. i. p. 221.

nature had endowed her; but it lacked much in delicacy and refinement, and only excelled, where excellence was obtained, by means of the direct copy of Madame Viardot's version, without which Grisi never would have been able, by her own intuition or ability, to have understood what was required of her. There were several changes in the cast this year, not for the better, Madame Dorus-Gras taking Madame Castellan's place, Tagliafico that of Tamburini, and Massol securing the part of Nevers, which he had already played in Paris. Mr. Sims Reeves was engaged for the part of Roderick Dhu, in Rossini's *Donna del Lago;* but, either from not liking it, or thinking it was not good enough for him, he merely walked through it, and threw little or no energy into the scenes, in which he was called to be present on the stage.

Having obtained her *congé* from the Paris Grand Opéra, Madame Viardot reached London about the middle of July, where she found Meyerbeer's *Prophète* all but ready for production, and requiring only her presence to be presented. Her triumph in this work was even more complete than it had been in *Les Huguenots* during the previous year, and the part of Fides she was ever after able to retain, so long as she remained a member of the Royal Italian Opera, because of Grisi having attempted it once in her absence, and having so unutterably failed that she did not dare to venture a second time upon music that did not suit her voice, and could not be transposed to do so, and for which she was not in the slightest degree adapted. This part was universally pronounced to be, in the hands of Madame Viardot, "an incomparable specimen of art and nature in perfect combination." In the great situations, which Meyerbeer had written expressly for her, especially in

the cathedral and coronation scene, there was a loftiness of enthusiasm about her manner to which no words could do justice. Her voice was also more sweet, even, and powerful than it had been in 1848; and she had so matured and improved her "creation" by study and consideration—she was always a thoroughly conscientious *artiste*—that nothing in any respect approaching it had ever been, and I may say has or will be, seen in my day.* She literally carried her audience away with her, from the first to the very last scene in which she had to appear. Mario's Prophète was also a most remarkable performance. The make-up of his face was, realistically, painfully beautiful, and his demeanour was so graceful and noble, energetic and subdued, that he seemed to be the very man he represented, and not an actor merely playing a part. He had again the advantage of Madame Viardot's advice and tuition,† and he was sufficiently discreet to use it profitably, to the increase of a popularity that never diminished, even when he could only sing with his hands, and had no voice to bear them company. The other characters, with the exception of the third Anabaptist (Signor Mei), were most creditably played by Signori Marini, Polonini, and Tagliafico; but Miss Catherine Hayes was by no means equal to the demands of the character of Berthe, as Madame Castellan would have been, and afterwards was, when she renewed her engagement at the Royal Italian Opera. Again no expense was spared upon *mise en scène;* and all the accessory details were attended to with the utmost precision; the ballet skating scene, as well as the coronation pageant, being magnificently put upon the stage—

* See *Athenæum* for 1849, p. 771.

† See above, p. 207.

much better, indeed, than they had been in Paris, where I saw the opera a few nights after its production, having gone thither expressly for that purpose. After this Madame Viardot appeared as Zerlina in *Il Don Giovanni*, which she rendered "with a delicious blending of peasant wonderment and girlish self-complacency;" whilst her singing of Mozart was in itself a study. With this brilliant performance and exciting intellectual pleasure, the third season of the Royal Italian Opera "went out like a lion." *

But very little need be said of the doings of Her Majesty's Theatre during the season of 1849. The company consisted of Mdlle. Alboni, Madame Frezzolini,† Madame Gazzaniga, Mdlle. Parodi—a favourite pupil of Pasta—and Mdlle. Giuliani; Signor Gardoni, and M. Bordas, with Calzolari ‡—an entire novelty, who did good service, being a Rossinian singer of much promise—Lablache, Coletti, Beletti, and F. Lablache. With the exception of Alboni, not one of the ladies

* See *Athenæum* for 1849, p. 892.

† See above, p. 133.

‡ Calzolari (Henri) was born at Parma, Feb. 22, 1823. He lost his father when he was thirteen years old, but although destined for a commercial career, he studied music with considerable assiduity. In 1837 he had for his master M. Burchardt, and made his first essays at a concert given by the Archduchess Marie-Louise for a charitable object. The result of this was his being granted a pension and sent to Milan to study under the tuition of Giacomo Panizza. In 1845 he commenced a three-years' engagement at La Scala, where he débuted in Verdi's *Ernani*. Two years afterwards he went to Vienna, and sang in *I Due Foscari*, *L'Italiana in Algieri*, *La Sonnambula*, and *Maria di Rohan*. Thence he went to Brescia and Turin, and returned to Milan during the autumn and carnival of 1846-7. For the third time he visited Vienna in the spring of 1847; then he went to Brescia, and thence to Madrid in 1847-8, going back to Milan in the spring of the latter year. Thence he proceeded to try his fortune at Brussels, London, and St. Petersburg, since which time he has fallen out of recollection. See Fétis' *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. ii. pp. 160-61.

produced the slightest impression. Mdlle. Parodi was continually thrust forward; but she never "made a public," and had to contend with one defect, which, like her instructress, she never mastered, precluding the possibility of her ever being a great singer—a propensity to sing falsely. Mdlle. Lind, who had not quite made up her mind to retire from the stage, nearly drove Mr. Lumley wild by her vacillation; but after many interviews, much consultation, and more entreaties, she consented to sing at six grand classical concerts in Her Majesty's Theatre, "*without* scenery, dresses, or decorations." The first concert, consisting of Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, was also the last, the result of the experiment being an utter failure. After this, that somewhat capricious lady made up her mind to retire from the stage, as she had already again and again threatened to do; but before doing so she consented to reappear four times in *La Sonnambula*, *Lucia di Lammermoor*, *La Figlia del Reggimento*, and *Robert*. On Thursday, April 26th, she began this engagement, and terminated it on Thursday, May 18th. Again was the "Lind fever" excited, and the manner in which her leave-taking was honoured must have rendered her too early and most unnecessary retirement so much the more bitter to herself, as it was vexatious both to her friends and the public. The season having been thus mercilessly cut up, Mr. Lumley had nothing else to do than to fall back upon the Countess Rossi (Madame Sontag),* with whom he had been many months previously in treaty. After much negotiation he obtained this lady's services; and although she was no longer what she had been twenty years previously, there was a sufficient charm about her to fascinate

* See vol. i. p. 158, and seq.

the then existing generation of *habitués*, as she had done the last. I was present at Madame Sontag's *début* on Saturday, July 7th, when *Linda di Chamouni* was given, and I can thoroughly verify Mr. Lumley's statement that "the sympathy her reappearance created was evidenced by the enthusiastic, and, it may be said, affectionate, reception with which she was greeted by an overcrowded house. The cheering was universal, genuine, unusually prolonged. That she herself should have been at first deeply affected, even to tears, at a greeting so heartfelt and spontaneous, was well conceivable. The revival of old memories, at those exciting and once-familiar sounds, joined to the thought of the causes which had placed her in that arena, must have moved her profoundly. A glance at the box where sat the husband and children for whose sake this great and noble sacrifice had been made, gave her the necessary courage. Sontag subdued her emotion. In a few minutes she was once more the *artiste*, and the *artiste* alone.*

The engagement of Madame Sontag brought the season to a happier termination than could possibly have been prognosticated, so that the losses were by no means so large as might naturally have been expected.

At the first Philharmonic concert, Mendelssohn's Symphonic Cantata *Athalie* was performed, to which the highest praise was due. The delight which the work from first to last produced must have been witnessed to be understood. The band, much strengthened and improved, strictly obeyed Mr. Costa's direction, and did themselves honour, the like of which the oldest member could by no means remember. The Cantata was repeated, with renewed success, at the second concert. At

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 253.

the six succeeding concerts I was not often present; but had I been so, a reference to the programmes indicates clearly enough that there was nothing of much importance to chronicle, save that Miss Kate Loder (Lady Henry Thompson) was the pianist at the fifth, and Mdlle. Neruda—since so well known as Madame Norman-Neruda—was the violinist at the seventh. At the Musical Union it may not be without interest to record that M. Hallé played, to the manifest satisfaction of the aristocratic members of that highly esteemed institution.

CHAPTER VI.

1850—52.

Brilliant, from an artistic point of view, as the Royal Italian Opera season of 1849 had been, as a financial speculation it had turned out most disastrous. To the public this disaster seemed to be inexplicable. The performances had not only been well attended, but on certain occasions, when any opera of more than ordinary popularity was represented, the theatre was crowded from floor to ceiling. When, therefore, the work, admirably done as usual, came to an end, and the report that had previously been whispered became confirmed, that the *entrepreneur* was hopelessly ruined, the conclusion immediately jumped to was adverse to any renewal of rivalry between the two establishments in the following year. Mr. Delafield, a junior partner in the firm of Combe and Co., the well-known brewers of Long Acre, had ventured upon operatic management, of which he was utterly ignorant, and the result was—bankruptcy of the most disastrous character. How and why this happened it is no part of my province to relate. Many causes were assigned for so sudden and ruinous a collapse, not the least probable of which was that the expenditure within the theatre for mounting such new operas as were brought out had been so extravagant, that neither a goodly number of subscribers

nor the support of the public could stand against it. To all intents and purposes no expense seemed to have been spared in this direction; but although the result was good for the progress of art, it was by no means equally so for the manager; who, although a business man, showed so little capability for his task, that, amongst those who knew him best, it was a matter of surprise that his losses, heavy as they were, had not been even more extensive.

As the Covent Garden adventure had never been forgiven by the old patrons and *habitués* of Her Majesty's Theatre, and Mr. Lumley was not a person to succumb whilst a shred of support from that quarter remained to him, the note of rejoicing of the disastrous issue of the Royal Italian Opera season of 1849 was both resonant and triumphant. Mr. Lumley asserts that "overtures were" even "made to him on the part of the gentlemen connected with the rival enterprise to merge both operas into one, and that advantageous terms were offered to him to retire from the management of Her Majesty's Theatre, in order to facilitate this design."* He had, however, a vaster enterprise in view—no less than to obtain the concession to himself of the Italian Opera in Paris, then in the hands of Ronconi, and to combine in his own grasp the two great speculations. At all events, the general impression prevailed, with more or less of disappointment and sorrow on the one hand, and of congratulation and rejoicing on the other, that another Royal Italian Opera season was scarcely to be anticipated.

From the very commencement of the establishment of a rival opera-house an *esprit de corps* amongst the leading *artistes* and the entire company, from the highest to the lowest, had been

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 260.

established, which was wholly without precedent in the history of any theatre in Europe. Rivalry had cropped up in 1850 between one or two of the more eminent amongst them, but it was not of sufficient influence even to depress the prevalent disposition to pull heartily together. Antipathy to Mr. Lumley and the system of his management had much to do with this. If ever it should come to pass that the Royal Italian Opera were defunct, it was thoroughly well known, that until another rival establishment were provided—the prospect of which would be far distant indeed—not one of those, who had thrown in their lot with the great secession, would ever again have a chance of being seen or heard in the then chief arena for the development of artistic talent, and the realisation of those pecuniary advantages, which very far surpassed anything that could be elsewhere met with. Concerts had not then become the rage. Monster Festivals were not even so much as thought of. The mine of wealth would be closed, except to such individuals as Mr. Lumley could secure, and whom he would be able to bend to his purposes. He would once more become "master of the situation," and how he would use it was no secret. Besides this also, the immense stride which operatic development had made in the years 1848 and 1849 would be driven back, and those who had been its promoters and assistants would not listen to the suggestion of retrogression. As events have turned out, whether it might not have been wiser to have permitted the enterprise to die, is problematical. After twenty-five years' experience, all the efforts—many of which were stupendous—that were made to secure a perfect *ensemble* seem to have gone for very little, since the operatic public is still in the full blaze of the mischievous "star"

system, before which adequate representation grows pale and still more pale. A rage for spectacle has also been engendered, which, being unaccompanied with perfect musical performances —the whole of the latter being sacrificed to the popularity of the individual, who is more cared for than the general effect is even thought of—merely gratifies the senses, without appealing to the judgment. In adverse combination with this disadvantage too is the fact, that notwithstanding the increase of the popular taste for musical entertainment within the last quarter of a century has been immense, that taste has not yet been educated—will it ever be so in this country?—up to the understanding and then to the appreciation of the works of the great masters, which never can have an adequate interpretation, so long as the rule of "my wife, and four or five puppets,"* is permitted to obtain.

Mr. Delafield's failure, instead, therefore, of disbanding the Royal Italian Opera Company, brought them into closer union. Mr. F. Gye, who was well known as a speculator in popular amusements, and also as a man of practical business habits and experience, was enlisted into the service, and so early as the month of September, after the closing of the theatre in August, 1849, became the lessee of the theatre, and of the scenery, dresses, wardrobe, music, properties, and effects belonging to it for the term of seven years, and at once entered into an arrangement with the principal *artistes*, by which the workpeople, chorus, band, and other subordinate functionaries received preferential payment of their salaries in full, whilst the surplus profit was to be divided among the parties in sti-

* See vol. i. p. 55.

pulated proportions, Mr. Gye's salary as manager being fixed at £1500 for the season.

During the recess the most active and energetic efforts were made to bring together, for the season of 1850, a body of *artistes* that would maintain at least, if not extend, the prestige which the previous years had so positively established. It was not, however, until the end of February that the programme was issued, announcing the commencement of work for the 16th of March. By that programme it was seen that several important changes in the company had been made. Mdme. Castellan returned in place of Mdme. Dorus-Gras and Miss Catherine Hayes; Mdlle. Vera* succeeded to the occupation of Mdlle. Corbari; Herr Formes—who had recently made an impression in London in some performances of German operas that had been unsuccessful—and M. Zelger, from Brussels, divided the work of Signor Marini between them; Mdlle. d'Okolski was to share the *contralto* duty with Mdlle. de Meric; whilst Signor Tamberlik and M. Merelt, under the name of Maralti, supplanted Signor Salvi. These additions in no way interfered with the other older-standing engagements, whilst Madame Viardot, as about to appear two months earlier than last year, and Signor Ronconi were promised. The programme further stated the intention of largely adding to the already considerably extended *répertoire*, and promised a season of equal brilliancy to those which had preceded it.

On Saturday, March 16th, as promised, the season was inaugurated by an admirable performance of Weber's *Der Freischütz*, under the Italianised title of *Il Franco Arciero*, for the *début* of Signor Maralti (Rodolph) and Herr Formes

* See above, p. 197.

(Caspar); Mdme. Castellan (Agatha) and Mdlle. Vera (Annetta) assisting in effecting a most agreeable combination. As in the German score of Weber's opera there are no recitatives, and M. Berlioz was known to have written some, it was taken for granted that these were added to the score, and great commendation was bestowed upon them. It turned out, however, that what the audience had listened to had been written expressly for the occasion by Mr. Costa, and were, not more justly than they merited, pronounced to be "nothing short of masterly in their modesty, their neatness, and their thorough harmony with the pieces linked together."* The new tenor—a former pupil of Senor Garcia—was warmly accepted, for although his voice was exceedingly metallic in quality and limited in register, it was perfectly in tune and sufficiently powerful. Herr Formes turned out to be the best Caspar that had ever been seen or heard in London, and although his "Italian" was then, and to the end of his career, the most atrocious that could be conceived, he was at once accepted as an invaluable addition to the *troupe*. The disposition to work together with a hearty goodwill was manifested by M. Massol† taking a trifling part (Killian), and so treating it as to make it quite a feature in the first act. The cast in its entirety was pronounced as of a truly polyglot character, but it was by no means the worse on that account. The band and chorus, which had been strengthened, played the overture and the accompaniments under Mr. Costa's direction *à merveille*, and the scenery, mounting, dresses, and properties being beautiful, poetical, and as hideously grotesque as required, tended to produce the utmost relish in an audience as attentive as it was overflowing. The breaking up the

* See *Athenæum* for 1850, p. 320.

† See above, p. 210.

ground for 1850 thus promised largely for the artistic success, at least, of the season.

The next eventful circumstance of the season was the *début* of Signor Tamberlik, a Roman *tenore robusto* of sterling quality, in *Masaniello;* Mario, who never liked the part, having given it up to his future "companion in (musical) arms" for many seasons to come. The first phrase which this singer delivered proved that he was of the truest type, his only fault being that of a somewhat too constant resort to the *vibrato*, a fault he never overcame. His acting was also spirited and vigorous, and although wanting in the grace which Mario now began to show in increasing excellence, was more suited to the personation of the enthusiastic and revolutionary Neapolitan fisherman.

Tuesday, April 7, witnessed the return of Grisi, Mario, and Tamburini in *Lucrezia Borgia*, and the first appearance of the new contralto, Mdlle. d'Okolski, the performance of which was perfect in every particular except as concerning the new-comer, who unfortunately turned out to be one of those singers whom increase of confidence could only render increasingly objectionable. On the following Thursday the *Norma* was given, with Tamberlik as the best Pollione since the days of Donzelli, Mdlle. Vera proving herself to be a competent Adelgisa, and Herr Formes anything but a satisfactory Oroveso, since he did not sing, but shouted the music of the part, and was totally deficient in that massive dignity which Lablache imparted to that important character.

Happily for the interest and the welfare of art at and about this period, operatic singers were not "done to death" by having to sing in opera, concerts, and private parties, not to

their own pecuniary advantage, but exclusively for the benefit of the *entrepreneurs* by whom their services are hired. Rehearsals were thus by no means difficult to be obtained, and on this account everything that was put upon the stage of the Royal Italian Opera had such attention given to it as would render the *ensemble*, not merely satisfactory, as it is now always under Mr. Costa's direction, but also perfect. When, therefore, Rossini's *Moïse*—under the title of *Zora*, to conceal its Scriptural *libretto* as much as possible from the observation of the British public—was given on Saturday, April 20th, the advantage of such unwearied preparation was abundantly apparent. The *Moïse* indeed was proved to be one of the grandest of Rossini's works, and made an impression that is not likely to be easily effaced. M. Zelger—whom I had previously heard in the same opera at Brussels, in the autumn of 1844—was by no means so successful as had been expected. Although his voice remained sufficiently resonant and tunable to accomplish the demands of his part, he was beginning to decline, and showed unmistakably that he was so by the evident difficulty with which he rendered Rossini's *fioriture*, which certainly was more suited to the flexibility of an Italian than of a Belgian *artiste*. He became, however, an eminently useful addition to the company, with which he remained till his death. Tamberlik greatly improved the impression he had made in *Masaniello*, and sang with an intensity of feeling and brilliancy of tone, which carried his audience by storm, and especially in the finale, "Dal tuo stellato soglio"—the well-known *Preghiére*, which Rossini wrote and scored in a few hours, to get rid of the absurdity of the original conclusion —also with a blaze of passion without caricature, and of power

distinguished from brute force, which insured a unanimous redemand. In the presentation of this great work Tamburini, in combination with Mdme. Castellan and Mdlle. Vera, lent considerable aid to render it complete. As heretofore, no expense was spared in putting this opera upon the stage; but it did not sufficiently "take" with the public to become a prominent feature of a *répertoire* that was continually being enlarged. The next "event" was a return to another of Rossini's *chefs d'œuvre*, *La Donna del Lago*—revived at the close of the last season*—in which Tamberlik replaced Bettini as Roderick, and made another "palpable hit." Mdlle. de Meric, who was substituted for Alboni, in the *rôle* of Malcolm, was not, however, similarly successful—a result, by comparison, not at all to be marvelled at, since nothing could ever give her voice the rich sweetness of her much greater rival. She did not improve either in any respect by her assumption of the part of Urbano, the page in *Les Huguenots*, which was produced with Grisi as Valentine, and Mario as Raoul, on Thursday, May 2nd, when Herr Formes took up the part of Marcel, that had been vacated by the departure of Marini, and gave a totally different version, entirely from the German point of view, of the sturdy, unbending, and faithful Puritan soldier, which, although not very favourably accepted at the time, became, when he had been well drilled, one of his most acceptable personations. There was one advantage, however, in his version that could but be admitted on all hands:—he sang in tune, which his predecessor very often failed to do.

The indefatigable characteristics of the season at the Royal Italian Opera were again manifested by one of the most perfect

* See above, p. 211.

representations of Meyerbeer's *Roberto* that had ever been witnessed since its original production in Paris, on Thursday, May 23rd, 1831.* This will be clearly enough perceived when it is stated that it had the advantage of the following remarkable combination of talent: Grisi (Alice); Castellan (Isabella); Tamberlik (Roberto); Mario (Raimbaldo); and Formes (Bertram). Aided by a magnificent *mise en scène*, and by every vocal, instrumental, and mechanical appliance that could insure success, it was not surprising that so remarkable a rèpresentation should have been called "*the* event, *par excellence*, of the season." The score had to be considerably curtailed to bring the curtain down by midnight, but this was so carefully done by Mr. Costa, that it met with the composer's entire approbation on its being submitted to him. The pity was that he could not have himself witnessed an interpretation that, to all intents and purposes, was as effective as, and in some respects even more so, than that which had been given in Paris under his own immediate direction, and by the *artistes* of his own peculiar choice. Grisi's Alice was by no means one of her best personations, but, having had the advantage of seeing Jenny Lind in what was termed her "crack part," she managed, as well as by means of the advice of Mr. Costa, which she was generally wise enough implicitly to follow, to give a fairly acceptable version, whether in its vocal force and finish, or in its simple and spirited acting. The Isabella of Mdme. Castellan, to whom the public had given no attention whatever, when she assumed the part at Her Majesty's Theatre, under the greater attraction of the more especial *étoile du nord*, proved to be an excellent rendering, indicating

* See vol. i. p. 241.

rapid improvement combined with confidence, in which she was generally, from the innate modesty of her nature, deficient. Tamberlik, although anything but well or in good voice, showed more than his usual competency as the hero; and Formes, in spite of being unequal to Staudigl, was a far better Bertram than any one that has as yet succeeded him therein. The gem of the opera, however, was Mario's Raimbaldo, the music of which part can never be sung better by any one else, and never had been before, or has been since, equalled. To have heard the descriptive song of Roberto in the first act, and the duet with Bertram in the second, was little else than priceless. The requirements of the season alone induced Mario to undertake this comparatively trifling *rôle*, but as he laid it aside very speedily, the beauty it added to the general effect of the opera was so transient, that it can be remembered now but by very few. By those few, however, who amongst them will ever cease to say, that so genuine and felicitous a circumstance must always be referred to with unmeasured pleasure and pain—pleasure at its having been witnessed—pain on account of the utter impossibility of its repetition?

On Thursday, May 31st, Ronconi—now rendered more "practicable" than he had ever been before, on account of his separation from his wife—put in appearance as the insane king in Verdi's *Nabucco*, in which the display of his dramatic genius was manifested with all its wonted force; yet the opera itself, pleased less than ever, and not even the characteristics of the actor could save it from so cold a reception that its repetition was scarcely possible—an event to be regretted, because it was almost the only specimen the operatic

stage has of late years furnished of a true ideal of the tragic drama.

Upon the repetition of *Il Don Giovanni*, soon after Ronconi's *rentrée*, nothing remarkable occurred beyond the personation of Leporello by Formes—a character in which he was known to have been considered highly successful at Vienna, and other German opera-houses. With the exception of a few hypercritical *habitués*, who persisted in pronouncing everything this clever *artiste* undertook to be rough and uncultivated, if not positively vulgar, the most ardent supporters and best instructed amateurs cordially welcomed the German basso, as giving idealisation to the character, and especially to the latter scenes, which had truthfulness entirely on its side. Instead of making the libertine's familiar serving-man act as a mere buffoon in the terrible scene between the statue and the murderer of the hidalgo, whom it represented, Formes imbued his personation with an amount of terror which was infinitely more natural than the rollicking humour, which even so great an *artiste* as Lablache was but too prone to adopt. He seemed to be wholly paralysed by the scene, and so bewildered that reason had all but left him; so that, in its way, it was fully equal to the powers Ronconi evinced, whenever he represented such characters as Chevreuse,* Iago, Nabucco, &c. Notwithstanding Formes' ability in the part of Leporello, he persisted to the last in asserting—"the Don, *she's* my best part." But as an opportunity, fortunately, was never given him in England of proving what he said to be true, the generality of his admirers were quite content to take his own

* See above, p. 191.

assertion, without desiring to undergo an infliction that could but have been intolerable.

Nabucco having failed to attract, there was no help for it but that Ronconi should fall back upon his comic powers, and these he revelled in to the utmost of their irresistible influence in such characters as Figaro (*Il Barbiere*), Dulcamara (*Elisir d' Amore*), and the Podesta (*La Gazza Ladra*). Into the last of these three characters he imported such a sneaking and vengeful manner, as to cause it to be doubted "whether his evil doer or Lablache's was the more villanously comical, or the more comically villanous." For my own part I must confess to have preferred his version to that of every other *artiste* I have ever seen in the Podesta—the truest conception of "an unjust judge" that ever can be realised.

Madame Viardot, having returned and gained new triumphs in the *Prophète*, wherein several changes for the better had been made, such as two of the Anabaptists being personated by Maralti and Formes, made a still greater sensation as the heroine of Halevy's *La Juive*, which, "mounted regardless of expense," was played for the first time on Thursday, May 25th. Once more the jealousy of Grisi, to which Mario most contemptibly succumbed, had well nigh marred the success of that important work. Mario had been cast for the character of Lazaro; but when the night came, urging illness as the cause, he positively refused to appear. What was to be done in such emergency well nigh bewildered everybody, except Madame Viardot, who, suspecting another trick, similar to that of the previous season, which she had cleverly defeated,* was ready with a remedy. She knew that Maralti had sung

* See above, pp. 204, 205.

and played the part in Belgium; so, when the news was imparted to her, her only reply was, "Very well! I am exceedingly sorry to hear what you say about Mario; but, as it cannot be helped, Maralti must take his place." That *artiste*, being sent for, at first demurred; but upon being convinced that an opportunity of letting the British public know what was in him might never again occur, he consented, provided he might not be required to sing anything else than the original of the French libretto. So reasonable a demand was, of course, immediately conceded. The consequence of this was a success, even greater than Roger had already won; * for, although Maralti could have no rehearsal, he so threw his energies into the character, that in the second act he raised the house, and insured such an encore as must have as positively mortified as it electrified Grisi, who had the bad taste to appear in a private box, in so prominent a position that every one could see her. Maralti was so terribly frightened at first, that he whispered to Madame Viardot, "I shall faint!" to which she instantly made answer, "If the man faints, what is to become of the poor woman?" throwing such an intensely characteristic look of whimsicality into her intelligent although by no means handsome face, that Maralti was assured on the instant, and sung with such intense force and passion—the metallic nature of his voice being most suitable to the occasion—that a positive triumph instead of failure was the result. On leaving the house, a truly loyal *habitué* was heard to say, "He will never sing that part again!" And he turned out to be a true prophet, for on the following Saturday Mario was well enough to undertake the character, which he persistently

* See above, p. 203.

kept henceforth to himself, although he was never at the pains either to make himself up so as to represent the aged Jew, to act the part, or to learn the music. As if, however, for the express purpose of annoying Madame Viardot whenever he appeared with her, he was guilty of the inexpressible meanness of attempting to throw her off her guard by talking the most absurd nonsense he could think of, as if he were engaged in that by-play which the exigencies of the several situations required. It is sufficient to say, that he was unsuccessful; for, as Madame Viardot afterwards told me, she so thoroughly understood his motive, that she positively had no notion of what he was whispering. And this was the return he had to make to the woman who had alone caused him to become an actor, and to achieve the position he had then, and afterwards won, and to obtain the remuneration which he has not had the good sense to save! It is distressing to hear that this once great *artiste*, now aged and worn out, is in absolute poverty; but such distress is very much diminished by the remembrance of two such circumstances as are here related, and may be thoroughly vouched for.

On the second night's performance of *La Juive*, Formes was suddenly taken ill, and Zelger had to be his substitute as the Cardinal; but he too made so much more of it, that he never appeared again in it, the German *basso* being content to drone out his ponderous music as if he would never bring it to an end, without showing "a hair of the calm, high-bred, yet not passionless churchman."* As her appearance in the *rôle* of the Jewess was amongst the most remarkable that Madame Viardot had ever made, it may be deemed to be not out of place to

* See *Athenæum* for 1850, p. 820.

record as just and appropriate a piece of criticism concerning it as could possibly have been written. "Madame Viardot's Rachel, seen after her Zerlina, her Fides, her Desdemona, justifies the most exigent critic in giving her blank credit as an operatic *artiste* of all styles of music—as an actress whether of tragedy or comedy. The pure soprano music, of which Rachel's part mainly consists, gives us occasion to hear how much Madame Viardot's voice has steadied, and become sweeter and more flexible by practice. Her declamation was what hers always has been. Her acting was incomparable. Though the part is full of such situations and effects as tempt the mediocre to commonplace and the superior to eccentricity, Madame Viardot contrived to go through it without a single foreseen burst or attitude—without the slightest melo-dramatic violence repulsive to taste. The intense yet girlish passion of a fervid nature, cherished by one of a proscribed race, is to be felt in the first two acts; in the third, the reckless vengeance of an outraged heart; in the fourth, the recoil from this upon the high thoughts, which must belong to deep and sincere love, and which make forgiveness its only revenge; in the fifth, the terror of death. The manner in which, while the dismal funeral psalm was sung on the place of execution, the victim moved across the stage to her father, paralysed by the real and near horror of her doom—her limbs scarce able to sustain her—and the low, hollow tone of her 'Ho paura,' as she nestled close to him, were art of that highest order in which, with all that is most appalling, there was still mingled an element of beauty. So admirably youthful, so orientally coloured, too, was the general demeanour of Madame Viardot's Rachel, as to make it hard to conceive how its representative could only the

other night have been the Flemish burgher heroine."* Combined with the excellence of Madame Viardot's personation of the heroine, and the admirable perspicuity with which all the numerous details of a most exacting opera were carried out, the scenic splendours were greater than was ordinarily the case even at the Royal Italian Opera.

From these "Recollections" it is evident that the Royal Italian Opera performances of the season of 1850 "had a ripeness, a passion, a spirit, a sonority, and a grandeur superior, as a whole, to anything that may be recorded in any similar European theatre, where government aids the treasury, and of which the public is not, like the subscribers of a London opera-house, incessantly craving for novelty."†

Her Majesty's Theatre, which opened for the season of 1850 on the evening of Tuesday, the 25th March, without any distinct or official programme having been issued,‡ may be dismissed in much fewer words than that of the Royal Italian Opera could possibly have been, for the latter was as rapidly "ascending" as the former was as decidedly "descending," both in *prestige* and public esteem. Under Mr. Lumley's continued direction, "with one signal and praiseworthy exception, provisional experiment, rather than a course of prearranged action, was the order of the day. Not one of the singers was able to do what Jenny Lind had done—fill the theatre by the attraction of her or his sole self: yet apparently, with some notion of reproducing such a miracle, they were manœuvred. Madame Sontag, the one great *artiste* of the *troupe*, was presented in all sorts of unsuitable music, vindicating her greatness as a vo-

* See *Athenæum* for 1850, p. 820. † Ibid. p. 931.

‡ *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 270.

calist by failing in none. Miss C. Hayes was tried in one hackneyed part, Lucia in Donizetti's opera, and as Cherubino in Mozart's *La Nozze di Figaro*, for which Mr. Lumley has himself asserted she was evidently unfit;* Mdlle. Parodi in another —the Medea in Meyer's opera—but both were laid aside when Madame Frezzolini came, who, in her turn, disappeared, and was replaced by Madame Fiorentini. By a like want of system, the first four tenors, Sims Reeves, Baucarde, Calzolari, and Michelli, were perpetually thust in each other's way, none of them having been allowed to make an impression as interpreters of music, but capriciously presented as 'stars.' In brief, the amount of power wasted would have 'womaned' and 'manned' a second theatre; not, indeed, of the first class, but which still, under a sagacious musical administration, first-class amateurs might have frequented. As matters stood, neither fashion nor amateurship was hit during the entire season. The average of the performances was lower than in former years, the orchestra more slovenly, and the chorus coarser."

Mr. Lumley's season, however, was brilliantly illustrated by the production of *La Tempesta*," by M. Halevy. "That a nicer discrimination might have been exercised in choice of subject, the company and the particular *troupe* of Her Majesty's Theatre considered—that M. Halevy was hardly likely, as a composer, ever to become a popular favourite in England—may be true; but still, the fact of the commission of a new grand opera having been given, and the resources brought to bear in working it out—to wit, a Sontag, a Lablache, a Carlotta Grisi—demanded honourable commemoration, not merely for their own sakes, but as having imparted a special interest to

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 274.

the season. It was said that the experiment was to be repeated in the following year, with M. Scribe as librettist and M. Halevy as composer;"* but it all came to nothing, simply because, puffed as ever it might be, *La Tempesta* turned out nothing else than a most complete *fiasco*, in spite of the performance of Lablache in Caliban—one of the greatest creations I had ever the good fortune to witness—having become "town talk." Mr. Lumley tells no more than the plain unvarnished truth when he makes the same admission, and says that, "the delineation of the character was the finest ever known, even amidst the many great actors who had figured in this extraordinary part upon the English stage." All was novel, all was artistic, in this wonderful personation. His "dull earthiness" and "brute ferocity," his expression of animal love for Miranda (Sontag), his savage exultation under the influence of wine, and his grovelling, but still revengeful despair, combined to form a masterpiece, and raised Lablache, if anything could raise him, to a loftier pinnacle of fame than before. Scarcely less striking was the Ariel of Carlotta Grisi, who exhibited more "mind," as well as more poetry of expression, in this than in any previous choreographic effort. Coletti (Prospero), Baucarde (Ferdinando), and Mdlle. Parodi, in the spirited little part of the sailor Stephano, as it stood in operatic form, all came in for the crumbs which fell from the rich harvest of acclamation so lavishly bestowed upon the above-mentioned *artistes*. Yet, and in spite of exquisitely painted scenery by Mr. Marshall, and a very clever contrivance of the sinking vessel in the Prologue, and the grand "sensation scene"—very like what may now be annually witnessed in the Drury Lane and Covent

* See *Athenæum* for 1850, p. 931.

Garden pantomimes—*La Tempesta* had but a "short life," and that by no means a happy one.

During the season, Pasta was unwise enough to try her fortune again upon the boards of this theatre, but having made it a rule, on no account whatever, during my long musical career, to hear a retired *artiste* on any of her most unwise re-appearances, I did not witness her failure. The account given me by those competent to judge fully accords with what Mr. Lumley has himself declared—that "it was a melancholy spectacle, not to say painful, to all who could feel with true artistic sympathy."*

After the close of the season, a series of "National Concerts" were inaugurated for the following October, upon the Jullien Promenade system, the failure of which was as signal as the venture itself deserved to be. Nothing indeed more truly contemptible in every respect could have been attempted, the managers seeming to have an idea that anything would suit the English taste; and although some eminent *artistes* were engaged as soloists, the orchestral arrangements were so raw and ill-defined, that the whole thing came to a financial loss, in spite of money enough having been spent to have floated "a national opera," which might have thriven and given encouragement to native energy and talent. Neither at the Philharmonic Concerts nor the Musical Union Matinées did anything very remarkable occur. They, however, maintained the reputation that had been won, and preserved the character for excellence which the direction of Mr. Costa on the one hand, and of Mr. John Ella on the other, had most happily initiated. Contrasts could but be drawn between the "doings"

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 285.

of those older institutions, and the novel venture which had turned out to be anything but that "intellectual entertainment of the highest order, embracing the greatest works of the greatest masters," that had been most lavishly promised.

To reproduce so preëminently brilliant a season at the Royal Italian Opera in 1851 as that of the preceding year, was simply impossible. Many circumstances conspired to such a result being impracticable, not the least of which were the various disagreements that were constantly arising among the *artistes*, who had come into an arrangement which had gone by the name of "the Republic," and of which Mr. Costa was the supreme musical, as Mr. F. Gye was the chief financial, president. At the close of that season it was perceived that a repetition of such arrangements must end in failure; and whilst Mr. F. Gye was hesitating what course to take, Col. Brownlow Knox offered to back him to the extent of 5000*l.*, if he would undertake to conduct the opera on his own account. This offer was accepted by Mr. F. Gye, and out of it, and other matters that afterwards transpired, a lawsuit arose, which, after having been carried through nearly all the Chancery courts, has only recently been decided on appeal to the House of Lords against Col. Knox. The *répertoire* was only increased by the introduction, towards the close of the 1851 season, of one opera—an Italian version of Mozart's *Zauberflöte*, Gounod's *Saffo* having failed to command anything like the esteem which Madame Viardot, who introduced it, had expected to be derived from it. The new vocal importations were anything but satisfactory, and consisted of four *débutants*, three gentlemen and one lady—Signors Salvatore and Bianchi, basses, Signor Stigelli, tenor, and Mdlle. Bertrandi, a *seconda donna*, in the

room of Mdlles. Corbari and Vera. Short work may be made of the characteristics of each of these competitors for fame and fortune. Signor Salvatore, who appeared in the place of Tamburini on Thursday, April 3rd, the opening night, as Assur in Rossini's *Semiramide*, had evidently been an *artiste* of some pretension; but graceful action and a pure method, according to the true canons of vocal art, offered no compensation for a voice that was utterly destroyed. Signor Bianchi was so thorough a second-rate that he also made no impression whatever but what was unfavourable, by débuting in *La Donna del Lago* on Tuesday, May 13th. Signor Stigelli made a tolerably successful *entrée* as Raimbaldo, in a very fine performance of Meyerbeer's *Roberto*, on Thursday, April 24th; but it was greatly to his disadvantage that he had to succeed Mario, who, in the previous year, had given an importance to that part which it had never had before or since. This misfortune he did not seem able to overcome, and thus never proceeded beyond the position of respectable utility. Mdlle. Bertrandi could not be rated as the equal of either of the ladies whose place she was engaged to supply, although her voice had been well cultivated, and her manner on the stage was pleasing and intelligent. Her first appearance was made in the Italian version of Weber's *Der Freischutz*, as Annetta, when Tamberlik assumed the *rôle* of Rodolph, which he evidently did not understand nor show any wish whatever to do. "The event" of the year was the presentation of Mozart's last opera with a very strong cast, consisting of Mdlle. Zerr, an express importation from Germany for the character of the Queen of Night; Grisi (Pamina); Mario (Tamino); Ronconi (Papageno), and such a Papageno as had never before been seen; Stigelli

(Minostatos); and Herr Formes (Serastro). Madame Viardot, like a true *artiste*, strengthened the cast by playing the little part of Papagena. In spite of the brilliancy which such efficient interpreters insured, and the richness of the stage appointments, the work fell flat, chiefly on account of the unintelligible dulness of the plot, which no acting or singing can fully supersede. Mdlle. Zerr by no means took the town by storm, and lost what little approbation she had won through Miss Louisa Pyne having been called upon to be her substitute in this opera on Tuesday, July 15, on account of her having been suddenly taken ill. M. Gounod's *Saffo* was given on Saturday, August 9th, too late in the season to permit of its performance being considered in any other light than that of an introduction. It was but coldly received, and having been mercilessly written down by certain critics, may be said to have been little else than condemned out of hand. It was observable that neither the revivals of works laid by for some years, nor positive novelties, had succeeded, with the exception of Meyerbeer's two grand operas, the acceptance of his *Roberto* having counted only as a half-success. But this, in a measure, resulted from the changes the new manager even then began to consider as indispensable. In comparison with what had gone on in previous years, Mr. F. Gye's commencement of operatic management could not be said to have been happy, and his season was, in consequence, anything but satisfactory, except in a financial point of view, which was believed to have been prosperous beyond expectation. From this cause that gentleman was smartly reminded, by no mean authority, that "he had been thriving on the character won in former years, and that high repute would not be maintained by economy in a few

soprano and *bassi*, or by foiling a Grisi or a Viardot with inferior play-fellows." On the other hand, in fairness to Mr. F. Gye, it could but be chronicled that he had had unusual meteorological difficulties to contend with, since such a year of never-ending influenzas had rarely visited the "tuneful choir." More than one of the singers belonging to the Royal Italian Opera had gone through the season with powers so seriously affected as to require indulgent construction and good-will. All such drawbacks and delays had been seriously damaging in more than one instance, where success had been of vital consequence. For example, they had hindered the immediate acceptance of M. Gounod's *Saffo*, owned though that work was by a large majority important enough to establish a reputation, to be the most remarkable first appearance of its time.*

Matters, so far from being better at Her Majesty's Theatre, were even worse; for Mr. Lumley's management, showy though it was in most respects, and experimental merely in others, had signally illustrated want of tact in the selection of novelties, and his working what should have been a good company very badly. His programme had been rich in great names. In addition to Madame Sontag, Mesdames Alboni, Parodi, Fiorentini, Giuliani, and Barbieri-Nini, with Mdlle. Caroline Duprez, the daughter of the celebrated French tenor,† were promised, whilst to the names of Gardoni, Sims Reeves, Calzolari, Coletti, Massol, and Lablache, those of Scotti and Pardini—two new tenors, who made not the slightest impression—and Ferranti were announced. Mdme. Ugalde, who had not been spoken of, was brought over to play and sing in

* See *Athenæum* for 1851, p. 933.

† See vol. i. p. 227.

Auber's most meretricious piece of profanity *L'Enfant Prodigue*, and Mdlle. Cruvelli also unexpectedly put in an appearance when the season was half over. The only really good move that was made was the production of Beethoven's *Fidelio*, which was immediately put up on the arrival of the latter lady, but was well-nigh spoiled by the outrageous manner in which she dressed the character of Leonora, which was said to have brought down a well-deserved reproof from the highest personage in the land. Of the four other unfamiliar operas produced at this house during the season—two old ones, *Masaniello* and *Gustave*, as well as *Lucrezia Borgia*—suddenly introduced for a young Sicilian, Mdlle. Aliamo, by no means qualified for the position of a *prima donna* either in London or Paris—a new one by Auber, *L'Enfant Prodigue*, and one by Thalberg, *Florinda*—not one succeeded. Of the new singers who appeared in rapid succession, only one deserved to hold her ground, while no one had in the least diminished the steady value of Madame Sontag. Mdlle. C. Duprez was nothing more than a well-trained beginner, and Mdme. Ugalde, in spite of her Opéra-Comique reputation, had not been even able to obtain a *succès d'estime*. Mdlle. Cruvelli also, notwithstanding the preternatural efforts made to represent her as a Malibran *rediviva*, was already not far from that Limbo of indifference which had closed over the triumphs of Mdlle. Favanti and Mdlle. Parodi. In her case the disappointment of those who were calculated to appreciate talent was greater than in theirs, because her gifts were more eminent, although, as it turned out, they were already wasted beyond the hope of retrieval, and spoiled past all chance of cure. Mdlle. Alboni made it also more than evident this year that as a *prima donna assoluta* London never

would accept her; whilst the really successful new-comer of the season, Madame Barbieri-Nini, made her *début* at too late a period to produce any lasting impression. With this lady, Mdme. Sontag, Mdlle. Alboni, and Mdme. Giuliani—a clever and painstaking singer as a *seconda donna*—excellent things might have been done in the matter of *ensemble;* but the "doings" at Her Majesty's Theatre were altogether feverish rather than substantially valuable, or offering promise for the future.*

At the fourth Philharmonic Society's Concert of this year Meyerbeer's wire-drawn, tawdry, and unsubstantial overture to *Struensee* was given, but, like almost every other orchestral prelude of that eminent composer, it proved to be but "a thing of shreds and patches," quite unworthy of his reputation; although it is but fair to state that a very opposite opinion of the work exists in Paris and Berlin, where the overture has always been popular. At the last concert for the season the orchestral novelty was a MS. overture by Mendelssohn, which was represented to be interesting as completing an acquaintance with his works. Herr Pauer, who has since established himself in London as a genuine pianoforte player and teacher, interpreted Hummel's Concerto in A minor,† and obtained a reception both well deserved and indicative of sound appreciation.

The programme of the Royal Italian Opera for 1852 was calculated to satisfy every one that the manager had resolved to conduct affairs with the utmost liberality. Whether he was altogether wise in the selection of new *artistes*, a *résumé* of the proceedings will abundantly show. A thoroughly satisfactory

* See *Athenæum* for 1851, p. 933.

† See vol. i. p. 191.

beginning took place on Saturday, March 27th, when it was at once discovered that the orchestra was richer and more brilliant than ever, having since 1851 been reinforced by the no less important additions of Signori Piatti as violoncello, and Bottesini as contre-basso *primi*, a pair of orchestral players that were expected to prove unequalled since the departure of Linley and Dragonetti; but who failed, from some inexplicable cause, to fulfil the expectations that had been formed concerning their value and usefulness. The chorus, which had been unwisely reduced in numbers in the preceding year, was also in a great measure restored to its former efficiency. The opera selected for the occasion was Donizetti's *Maria di Rohan*, in which Ronconi again acted Chevreuse with all his accustomed force and energy; Madame Castellan assuming the part of the heroine, which she sang and acted with her usual care, which, in the absence of real dramatic genius, always made her appearances welcome. The contralto part of Gondi was undertaken by Mdlle. Theresa Seguin, a complete novice as to stage business, but possessing one of the most sweet and even voices it was ever my good fortune to listen to, the compass of which consisted of two octaves, from G to G, and appeared to have been trained in a good school. On Thursday, April 1st—much to the discontent of Tamberlik, who then and there made a vow in my hearing—which he did not keep—that nothing should ever induce him to undertake the part in which he felt himself to have been unwarrantably superseded—Herr Ander, a celebrated German tenor, undertook that of Arnoldo in Rossini's *Guglielmo Tell*, whilst Ronconi played the hero, in the room of Tamburini, who had altogether fallen out with the Royal Italian Opera management, as he had done in former

years with that of Her Majesty's Theatre. The judgment pronounced at once upon the new tenor was that he was thoroughly German, and only in a slight degree superior to Maralti, but by many degrees inferior to Tamberlik. He made no impression whatever. Not so Ronconi, whose personation of Tell was a marvellous specimen of histrionic power and passion, his manner being as spirited, frank, and noble as his Chevreuse was courtly, his Dulcamara absurdly droll, and his Figaro gaily vivacious. To suit his voice much of the music had to be transposed, but his phrasing was so perfect that the by no means slight deficiency of his intonation was universally overlooked. The return of Marini caused the part of Walter to be efficiently filled, and gave due effect to the celebrated *terzetto* of the second act, "Troncar suoi di," the passion of which came out with unusual force, and secured a well-deserved encore. The singing, and acting too, of the chorus in the celebrated finale, "the gathering of the Cantons," were truly superb, the whispering of the passage, in which it is indicated that the choice of leadership had fallen upon Tell, being one of the most striking incidents that has ever been introduced into numerical histrionic action, whilst the cry "To arms!" was so thrilling as to cause more than half the house to rise at the call, as if infected by a sudden spirit of patriotism. The band never played better, so that the performance had to be reckoned as one of the greatest triumphs that had ever been obtained within the walls of the Royal Italian Opera-house.

Between the presentation of Rossini's *Guglielmo Tell* and Donizetti's *I Martiri*, which was produced on Tuesday, April 20th, a Signor Galvani appeared as Elvino in the *Sonnambula*, but did not evince anything like sufficient influence, either

by voice or action, to effect the result his name naturally suggested. Madame Castellan was the Amina, and succeeded in showing how valuable an acquisition she was to any establishment, in which she held an engagement, by her habitual readiness to play a series of parts at a few minutes' notice. The *Martiri* is a noisy and unequal opera, as dull and flat as ditch-water till the finale is reached, when a series of passages are so arranged as to "bring down the house," provided the *artistes*, to whom the *rôles* of the heroine and hero are intrusted, can shout as with the lungs of a pair of Stentors. Madame Julienne, a Belgian lady, who had been six years previously heard in London, was especially engaged for this opera, in which she did good service, and invariably roused the audience to enthusiasm in the concluding scene; but, in an artistic point of view, she was nothing better than a useful second rate. Tamberlik unquestionably did the first damage to his voice, that once brilliant organ sustained, by acceding to the demands this opera made on him, which were so much the more disadvantageous because they in no measure increased the popularity after which he most ardently pined, but never thoroughly realised.

An evil genius must have induced Ronconi, on Thursday, May 6th, to have re-attempted—as was truly said by Madame Pasta—the representation of Don Giovanni, he having some years previously made a *quasi fiasco* in the same character at Her Majesty's Theatre. This great *artiste* neither looked, nor could he be said to have acted, the character. It seemed indeed as if he were at the utmost pains to show this, for "he lacked grace, dignity, and every personal requisite." At first, when he fanned his forehead with the plume of his hat, after

the Commendatore had been slain, he left the impression upon his audience that he was going to make the part as great a creation in point of acting as were his Chevreuse in *Maria di Rohan*, his Iago in *Otello*, or his Don Alphonso in *Lucrezia Borgia*. This point was, however, by no means followed by another single evidence of competency. "To atone for the absence of those qualities without the appearance of which the part of Don Giovanni is insufferable, he strove to invest the character with an extraneous interest, and in the height of his endeavours metamorphosed it into a species of Figaro without his guitar and shaving tackle. He was as great a charlatan as Leporello himself, and the consequence was that there were two Leporellos; instead of the gallant cavalier and polished insinuating scoundrel associated with his familiar bravo and buffoon, there were two familiar bravos and buffoons—two mountebanks, in short."* Marini was the Leporello, and anything but a competent one, inasmuch as he was by no means even note-perfect in his music, and his fun was as vulgar as it was of the driest. Tamberlik as Don Ottavio rarely sang better; but he walked through the part, as he invariably did, as if nothing could be made of it. Mdme. Castellan was an attractive Zerlina, and Grisi was as grand as usual as Donna Anna. But the Donna Elvira of Mdlle. Bertrandi was scarcely endurable, that *seconda donna* being wholly unequal to the difficult music with which Mozart has weighted that ungrateful part.

On Thursday, May 20th, M. Halevy's *La Juive* was brought forward for the first appearance of M. Gueymard, the then—as now—leading *tenore robusto* of the Paris Grand Opéra. Madame Julienne attempted the part of the heroine, and singularly

* See *Times*, May 7th, 1852.

failed; whilst Stigelli, who tried his hand at playing Lorenzo, was so weak, that the new-comer had scarcely a chance of making his way with an exacting public, who retained much too vivid remembrances of what had been done by Maralti and Mario in the part of Lazaro, to be satisfied with anyone else in their place and room. The opera, which had never been a favourite, in spite of the superb manner in which it was presented, was thus actually killed by the inefficient cast of its second season. M. Gueymard only sang three times, and then left the theatre and London in disgust.

On Tuesday, June 19th, appeared a new *prima donna* who was to become one of the chief supports of the Royal Italian Opera in future seasons, Madame Bosio, but whose first attempt at gaining the approbation of the *habitués* ran very closely indeed upon being a failure. Indeed, it was only as a vocalist that this lady afterwards won her way into popular esteem, since of histrionic talent she had scarcely a particle. It was said of her Adina, that "it showed she might, within the sphere of stars of the second magnitude, be more than useful, even precious; but that if she remained at Covent Garden, it would not be to replace any of the *prime donne* already in the theatre, but to supply the want left by the departure of Mdlles. Corbari and Vera."* My own opinion thoroughly accorded with these remarks, and indeed to the end of her career I never could admit Madame Bosio to a place amongst that long succession of brilliant female *artistes*, whose excellences I have had the pleasure to speak of in glowing terms. Signor Galvani, who played the lover, Nemorino, made nothing of it; and Signor Bartolini, a promising young

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 682.

singer, who was the Sergeant Belcore, did little else than prove that he possessed a legitimate baritone voice of mellow and penetrating quality, which was by no means well cultivated, and required more severe training than it had yet received. The thoroughly admired personation of the evening was Ronconi's Dulcamara, but even that was much more dull than usual, chiefly on account of the restraint three such absolute novices imposed upon him.

On Thursday, July 15th, Spohr's *Faust*, which had been for some time in rehearsal, was given, the composer appearing in Mr. Costa's place, who, with the true feeling of a genuine *artiste*, undertook to play the organ behind the scenes, in compliment to the talent and genius of his more aged contemporary. There was, on this occasion, a certain amount of heaviness about the performance which told very much against the probability of that opera ever becoming a favourite with the Royal Italian Opera subscribers. Nothing could possibly exceed the poetical grace of Ronconi in the title *rôle*, or surpass the propriety and expression of his singing. Madame Castellan's Cunegonda was also exceedingly well sung; and Tamberlik outdid himself by his thorough comprehension of the music, the splendour of his voice, and the refinement of his vocalisation in the character of Ugo. Mdlle. Zerr, as Rose, was much out of voice, and entirely deficient in pathos and simplicity, and evidently neither felt nor took the slightest interest in a small part, which she appeared to think quite beneath her notice. The Mephistopheles of Formes was a remarkable personation, being truly demoniacal in the play of his countenance, and as characteristic as any one of Retsch's drawings of Göthe's fiend tempter. His singing, being spe-

cially German, was in every way well suited to the occasion. Upon the repetition of this opera a few nights afterwards, when Mr. Costa resumed the bâton, the spirit and vivacity which superseded the heaviness of the composer's direction could not fail to be marked by a crowded and intelligent audience. If, as it was generally surmised, the appearance of the great German *maestro* in the orchestra was intended as "a means to the end" for supplanting the very life and soul of the Royal Italian Opera, it most signally failed, as afterwards a similar attempt in the same manner, by means of Berlioz, also proved wholly ineffectual. It took a long series of years to effect this "foregone conclusion;" but when it did come to pass, the fate of the Royal Italian Opera was thereby effectually sealed, as "the whirligig of time" is most incontestably proving.

The most decided failure of this year was that of Signor Negrini, whom Mr. F. Gye had engaged upon the strength of a Milanese reputation, and whose appearance in *Norma*, as Pollione, was pronounced, rightly enough, to have been that of "the worst tenor of pretension that had appeared at this theatre." *

The most deplorable event of the season was the introduction of a medley, to which the name of an opera was applied, under the title of *Pietro il Grande*, by M. Jullien. It is wholly unnecessary to say anything more of that specimen of vulgar pretension than that it was most deservedly hissed off the stage. The production of so miserable an abortion was wholly against the advice of Mr. Costa, who positively refused to have anything to do with an attempt that was calculated permanently to reduce the *prestige* which the Royal Italian

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 877.

Opera had hitherto well and worthily won. This year must indeed always be recorded as that of infinite damage done to *Le Prophète*, by forcing Grisi into a part out of her voice, and beyond her means, and as that of a novelty so ruinously costly, yet so completely in the Cremorne style, as *Pietro il Grande*, of which M. Jullien persisted to the last day of his life in asserting that Meyerbeer, having been present in disguise, had stolen every note and scene for his *L'Étoile du Nord*.

The season of 1852 may be said to have given the *coup de grâce* to Mr. Lumley's management. At the head of his programme he had announced the engagement of Mdlle. Joanna Wagner, the *prima donna assoluta* of the Berlin opera, who, with several new engagements, in association with some of older standing, was to raise the fortunes of the house from impending ruin. Amongst the more prominent of the latter were Sontag and Cruvelli, Fiorentini and Alboni, as *prime donne*, and Mdlle. Ida Bertrand as contralto; the tenors being Gardoni, Calzolari, and Pardini, and the bassi Lablache and Beletti, on his return from his American tour with Jenny Lind, and Benedict. Negretti, a tenor of leading repute, and De Bassini, a baritone of note, were also promised as probable additions to a numerically strong *troupe*. "An evil vein of luck," as Mr. Lumley himself asserts,* "had set in, and still ran adverse to the critical venture, sweeping away the manager's most sanguine hopes in its disastrous current. Firstly arrived the intelligence that Madame Sontag could not come." Then Mdlle. Wagner's father accepted a more lucrative engagement at Covent Garden, which induced immediate legal proceedings, the final settlement of which did not take place till the 20th of

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 329 et sqq.

February in the following year, too late to render the lady's services available at either theatre. These *contretemps* prevented the opening of the theatre before the 1st of April, and then Signor Ferlotti, a baritone of considerable continental reputation, did nothing in *Maria de Rohan* to confirm the reports that had been circulated respecting his attainments. Mdlle. d'Angri, a contralto of some merit and repute, made no impression whatever in *La Cenerentola;* and although performances continued to be given, rumour was rife that Gardoni "was about to leave the company; next that Mr. Balfe intended to secede; then that Lablache was dissatisfied, as well he might be, and that Cruvelli was anxious to depart. Indeed that lady, having received tempting offers from the Grand Opéra at Paris, was the first to quit the theatre!" Attempts were made by a committee of noblemen and gentlemen, friends and well-wishers of Her Majesty's Theatre, to keep the house open until the end of the season, which was chiefly effected by the exertions of two hitherto entirely untried ladies, Mesdames Lagrange and Charton—not the least of which resulted in the utter failure of the Duke of Saxe-Coburg's *Casilda*, which, listened to by a crowded house on Thursday, August 5th, neither "roused attention nor commanded applause." Every effort, indeed, proved to be useless. The struggle was bravely and energetically carried on; but it was hopeless against a tissue of misfortunes which increased with reiterated persistency on all hands. Mr. Lumley had "sown the wind." He was now "reaping the whirlwind."

The Philharmonic Society commenced its operations this year with new vigour, several valuable additions having been made to the band by the removal of one or two of the inefficient older

members, whom, although completely past their work, the directors had hitherto persisted in retaining in opposition to Mr. Costa's remonstrances. At last, however, he succeeded in making it apparent that, without the infusion of the best talent that money could give, the prosperity and popularity of the Society must decline. The satisfactory results of this decision were immediately apparent. The most useful new player was Mr. Pratten, as first flute; for although Signor Piatti (violoncello) and Signor Bottesini (double bass) were placed at the first stand together, they failed to become of that essential value which had been anticipated from their engagement. The first concert, given on Monday, March 15th, was more noted for the brilliancy of its orchestral *ensemble* than for any novelty in the selection either of compositions or of principal singers, the latter of whom were Madame Castellan and Mr. Sims Reeves. Herr Hallé played Mendelssohn's Second Concerto better than it had yet been rendered by any one save the composer himself. His interpretation, however, was more remarkable for the finish of his method and the accuracy of his mechanism than for any other quality. Sivori introduced a florid violin *fantasia* upon the "Fra-poco" air of Donizetti's *Lucia di Lammermoor*, which was done to death by the difficulties wherewith it was overloaded, and which, unfortunately, were not beyond the compass of that violinist's mechanism. Nothing worthy of remark occurred at any of the succeeding concerts beyond Joachim's playing at the fourth and sixth,—at the former in one of Spohr's double quartets, and at the latter a trashy concert-fantasia of his own preparation upon the two homely Scotch airs, "John Anderson" and the "Blue Bells," which might have passed for an extempore affair on account of

its want of form and substance. At the last concert Herr Hiller's Symphony "Im Freien" was conducted by that clever composer, but failed to produce any warmth of feeling, "not because the first ideas were poor, or wanted contrast, but because episodical relief was too timidly introduced, and yet more because of his taste"—or rather want of taste—"in instrumentation." A second hearing, from which an advance in popular regard was anticipated, was not granted.*

The Philharmonic Society thus did little else than just maintain the position that Mr. Costa had secured for it—a strange proceeding considering that a formidable rival had started up under the attractive but not very honest designation of "the New Philharmonic Society," the first concert of which, with M. Berlioz as conductor, took place on Wednesday, March 24th, at Exeter Hall. Of the first part of this concert nothing more needs to be said than that Mozart's "Jupiter" Symphony was very "carefully rendered, although the *tempo* was generally felt to have been taken too slowly, and the adherence was unusual as to the repeats," which, in this class of composition, expressly written for performance at the German court dinner-parties, were intended to fall in exactly with the time such entertainments might be expected to take up. The concert, however, was simply remarkable for the introduction of M. Berlioz's *Romeo and Juliet* symphony, which had never before had a chance of being heard in England. To the multitude this work was evidently *caviare*, but to such musicians as were unprejudiced and ready to admit excellences whenever and wherever they were met with, it was as welcome as it was pronounced to be detestable by such as acted and spoke upon

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 730.

a foregone conclusion. It would take up too much space to analyse this work in these "Recollections," and independently of this, it has long ago been consigned to "the tomb of all the Capulets in England, except in Germany and France, where it has had a great success," and is by no means likely to be ever heard again, at least, within the remainder of the present century. The favourable impression it made upon my mind is still retained, and I have never changed the opinion I formed upon its merits—or rather its demerits, as the generality of the then existing critics determined—that although fanciful and capricious to a degree in many parts and places, it was full of melodic beauties, rife with demonstrations of highly finished scholarship, and rich beyond what was then usual with respect to orchestral colouring. As was fearlessly remarked by Mr. H. F. Chorley at the time, only to bring down ridicule upon his head by those from whom better treatment might have been expected, "there was nothing timid, nothing dull, nothing harsh in M. Berlioz's palette, no wasted colours, no dreary patches of back-ground to bring out peculiar points and passages by trick; but a charm, glow, tenderness, and grandeur, diffused as each was required."* So vastly opposed, however, was the general run of criticism to the above expression of congratulation and praise, that M. Berlioz became completely disheartened, alleging in unmeasured terms, for which there seemed indeed to have been sufficient justification, that he had not altogether had fair play. The second concert, on Wednesday, April 14th, was a miserably dull affair, chiefly on account of the selection being almost entirely confined to the interpretation of the works of English composers, the most remarkable of which was

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 362.

a Concerto by Dr. Wylde—with whom the New Philharmonic Society had originated—which, although carefully and judiciously played by M. Billet, was, not quite justly, pronounced to be "fit only for a Royal Academy Concert, or other training arena, in which by hearing his music, the student on self-correction bent might study his deficiencies."* A remark so severe as this, however, had much of its origin from the injudicious description, given in "the books of the words," of Dr. Wylde himself, as one who "held a recognised position amongst the ablest musical professors of the day," an assertion which evidently took most people by surprise. The other English work given at this concert—Mr. E. Loder's "Island of Calypso"—occupied the whole of the second act, and also met with no favourable acceptance, since it was infinitely inferior to that gentleman's "Nourjahad" and "The Night Dancers," which had previously caused something closely akin to a legitimate sensation. The work, in fact, seemed merely to display the readiness and self-possession of one who cared little what he wrote, and who had lost that freshness of interest, if not of invention, which made any attempt far less pretty and far more uncouth, more interesting, because more promising.† It was further truly enough predicted that "a few more displays of native talent" such as the second concert of the New Philharmonic Society exhibited, "would throw a wet blanket, if not a funereal pall" over it.

At the third concert, on Wednesday, April 28th, Mdme. Pleyel,‡—a lady who rejoiced in the designation of "the queen

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 534.

† Id. ibid.

‡ Pleyel (Marie-Félicité-Denise, first known as Mdlle. Motte), was the daughter of a Belgian father and a German mother, whose first master was

of pianists," because that with all her power she was still feminine,—played Weber's Concert-Stück with dash and vigour; but, as I then thought, and as I shall always think, with anything but a due appreciation of the intention of the composer. This fault, however, was in some measure due to the carelessness of M. Berlioz, who took no pains to keep the orchestral accompaniments within due bounds, so that Madame Pleyel had literally to force her way through that deservedly popular work by dint of her own individual powers. One or two of the "numbers" of the conductor's *Romeo and Juliet* Symphony were repeated on this occasion, but without any advantage, although both he himself and his music were most warmly applauded. Another feature of the evening's entertainment consisted of a selection from Spontini's *La Vestale*, including the splendid finale of the second act—a performance so much the more acceptable because that opera had always been doomed to an ill fate in England. It fell dead, however, and no wonder, because of its being given at a period of the evening when the other important and complicated works that preceded it had absorbed the attention, and induced little else than weariness throughout the audience, one half of whom were departing all the time it was going on. The feature of the fourth of these concerts, on Wednesday, May 12th, was Beethoven's Choral Symphony, the soprano solo part of which

M. Jacques Herz, under whom she gave, at the age of nine years, such early promise of future celebrity that both Moscheles and Kalkbrenner accepted her as a favourite pupil. At fifteen years of age she had established a reputation that never diminished so long as she was before the public; her playing being as acceptable throughout the Continent as it proved to be in London. In 1848, she was appointed professor of the pianoforte at the Paris Conservatoire. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. vii. pp. 79, 80.

was sung by Mdme. Clara Novello, who had returned to the duties of her profession, and was in very fine voice. She was ably assisted by Miss Williams, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Herr Staudigl, but although the work was conducted by M. Berlioz with the true spirit of intimate knowledge and affectionate reverence, it was not played with that perfection "which had been promised when the Society was started." The wind instruments were always feeble and not always sure, and in the *adagio*, the florid violin passages of the variations were confused, owing to want of agreement amongst the performers.* The fifth concert, on Wednesday, the 2nd of June, was by no means more successful than the third and fourth; for a pianoforte concerto by M. Silas, of which the largest expectations had been formed, by no means turned out the remarkable production, of which report had spoken more enthusiastically than truly. Neither was an overture by M. Berlioz, entitled "Les Franc Juges," of sufficient merit to make up for the general disappointment that already had but too positively been raised. Weber's "Invitation à la Valse," as instrumented by the same gentleman, met with little acceptance, since, notwithstanding its admitted cleverness, the proceeding was utterly unclassical, and on that account was depreciated, more positively perhaps than was either just or merited. The only spark that lightened an excessively dull performance was M. Sivori's playing of Mendelssohn's violin concerto; but this, like everything else, was injured by the want of closeness in the accompaniments both of the stringed and wind instruments; the former being habitually all abroad, and some of the more delicate of the latter being altogether inefficient.

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 534.

The last concert of the season, on Wednesday, June 9th, was by far the most brilliant of the series, Beethoven's Choral Symphony having been repeated, in some respects more fully and firmly than on its former performance. The second part was rendered interesting by some passages from the *Faust* of M. Berlioz—"the Peasant's Round, the Hungarian March, and the Chorus and Dance of Sylphs." The Chorus, which is of a deliciously voluptuous character, was received with the warmest approbation, although the two former "numbers" had attracted a considerable amount of well-merited commendation. "Besides this music, part of a sacred Cantata by Dr. Wylde was performed, and Mdme. Pleyel interpreted some of Liszt's transcripts from Rossini's *Soirés Musicales*. Although, as to its financial results, this new Society was by no means successful, it was established at all events in public curiosity, if not in public sympathy. The mistakes in the direction of the business, both musical and financial, were numerous and positive, for the outlay had been excessive, and not altogether judiciously expended. There was one feature, however, about the proceedings, which gave the utmost satisfaction in professional circles—the free access given to artists, which had been liberal in no ordinary degree.

The Musical Union *matinées* of this year increased greatly in interest, since not only was Joachim playing his best at them, but a new pianiste was brought forward, who took the highest position that could be won, in spite of the cruelty with which she was treated by a certain portion of the press—Mdlle. Clauss.* On Tuesday, May 11th, she played at the Musical

* Clauss (Wilhelmine), the daughter of a merchant, was born in 1834, at Prague, and manifested at an early age that promise of celebrity which was

Union Mendelssohn's trio in C minor, and Beethoven's sonata in F minor, besides "selections" from Scarlatti and Chopin, without any preparation or rehearsal whatever, with a power of execution, a solidity of hand, and a spirit of rendering that manifested rare artistic excellence; whilst on the evening of the same day she interpreted Mendelssohn's first concerto by memory in a manner to insure universal estimation, her method "being alike large, unaffected, and intelligent, fiery and expressive as should be, yet consistent with the most rapid and pearly lightness of finger that the most mercurial *scherzo* by Mendelssohn demands." As an illustration of Mdlle. Clauss's power over her hearers in opposite styles, it may be remarked that in the morning the *scherzo* of the trio, and in the evening the slow movement of the concerto, were tumultuously encored. But at her own concert, on June 19th, she manifested to the fullest extent the competency with which she could

in after years so fully confirmed. Her first master was M. Joseph Procksch, a teacher of acknowledged merit. Mdlle. Clauss's progress was so rapid that her musical education may be said to have been completed in 1849, when she began a tour in company with her mother, during which she carried all before her, both with the public and with the musical *cognoscenti*. At Dresden her success before the Court was most brilliant. At Leipsic, Liszt, Spohr, and Schumann predicted that her career would be eminent, whilst at Brunswick, Cassel, Frankfort, and Hamburg, she was overwhelmed with applause. She did not visit Paris until the end of 1852, after her visit to London, where she *débuted* at a concert given by Berlioz, and played Beethoven's first Concerto, to the satisfaction of one of the most exacting audiences of the whole world. On the death of her mother, which took place suddenly, she was placed under the protection of Madame Ungher Sabatier, and retired for a whole year from the duties of her profession, after which she again visited London, Germany, and Hungary. She afterwards married M. Szarvady, and fixed her residence at Paris, in 1857, where she remained until the recent Franco-German war, when she again came to London, but not publicly, to follow the duties of her profession. See Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. ii. p. 171.

perform the most exacting music of every style, and overcome every difficulty. Her programme included specimens by Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn, Chopin, and Thalberg, a wider range being hardly conceivable. Although in trusting wholly to her memory, Mdlle. Clauss was on this occasion somewhat rash, which caused her now and then to falter, her intentions were never doubtful, or her readings dull, whilst the feeling she evinced was singularly deep and marked for one so young, because it was so simple. In short, her performance deepened the conviction that this young *artiste* would stand almost alone among female pianists, and be approached by very few of their number—a conviction that was speedily most thoroughly confirmed.

At the sixth meeting of the Musical Union on Tuesday, June 15th, Beethoven's trio in C minor, for stringed instruments alone, was led with great breadth of feeling, nobility of tone, and largeness of style by M. Vieuxtemps, and Herr Hallê played Beethoven's third sonata to perfection with respect to mechanism, but with that coldness of manner which he has never been induced to lay aside.

CHAPTER VII.

1852—56.

It is impossible to pass onward from the "Recollections" of 1852 without referring to the three provincial Musical Festivals which took place in the autumn at Birmingham, Hereford, and Norwich. Although no novelty was brought forward at the first of these triennial gatherings, its celebration was, in every sense of the word, unique, not only because of the exceptional talent which was engaged, including Mdmes. Clara Novello and Viardot, Mdlle. Zerr, Miss Dolby, and Miss Williams, Mr. Sims Reeves, Signor Tamberlik—who declaimed with immense power the difficult English song in Handel's *Messiah*, "Thou shalt dash them"—and Herr Formes, but of the marvellous precision with which every style of composition, under Mr. Costa's direction, was given.

The distance between Birmingham and Hereford is by no means great, but if the quality of the performances of the one had been tested by those of the other, it could but have appeared to have been all but interminable, for everything that was done there was notoriously managed with the least possible artistic value and significance. A worse manifestation of provincial incompetency, associated with obstinacy, could scarcely have occurred. Of Norwich, little else could be said than that

it was of a thoroughly experimental character, a mass of new music by unknown composers being pressed forward, as if to produce failure of set purpose. The leading singers, too, with the exception of Madame Viardot, were by no means the best whom money could have secured, and being new to provincial Festivals were, most undeservedly, treated by the public with scant courtesy. Indeed, it may be supposed that neither Madame Fiorentini, Miss Louisa Pyne, nor Signor Gardoni, were ever more unceremoniously regarded in any place or under any circumstances than at this Festival. Another feature of decided novelty was the reading of Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* by Mrs. Fanny Kemble, with Mendelsshon's music, which gave to the first of the evening performances the air of a mixed entertainment, which, although anything but unpleasant, was yet open to comment. The sacred performance of this Festival commenced with the psalm, "Let God arise," by Mr. H. Leslie, then a rising musician, but now one of thoroughly established fame and reputation. The solos of this composition were sung by Miss Louisa Pyne, Miss Alleyne —a second soprano of very second-rate attainments—and Mr. Lockey. The first of these, who had not been heard before in a similar position, proved to be an acquisition of the highest value in oratorio, being as steady in thoroughly classical music, as she was brilliant when called upon to sing compositions of a lighter and more florid character. After Mr. H. Leslie's psalm had been given, an oratorio by Dr. Bexfield, entitled *Israel Restored*, was produced, concerning the success of which large hopes were entertained, because of that musician having been born at Norwich, and educated—musically—in the cathedral of that city, although he had taken up his residence in London,

and become the organist of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate, where, singular to say, he was associated with a clergyman, also a native of the same city, who had received his musical training in the same choir, the stipend of each appointment being the excessively liberal sum of £40 per annum! Dr. Bexfield's further means of subsistence were eked out by the drudgery of teaching —the inevitable fate, as it is the miserable misfortune, of all musicians in England who have the taste and talent for composition. Of this oratorio it may, with the utmost truth, be said, that it was "highly honourable to so young a composer; large, calm, and dignified in style, and not the less acceptable because it breathed a certain air of the cathedral choir, in which his early studies," chiefly without adequate assistance, "were made." The opinion of an authority fully capable of speaking on the merits of this work with a reliable decision—which I am only too glad to be able to quote, because it agrees wholly and decidedly with my own—was that "though the most forcible and picturesque effects were not shrunk from in some of the choruses, there was no eccentricity, no untoward writing for the voices, no coarse or crude harmony, the composer's models seeming to have been Handel and Mozart, rather than Beethoven and Weber, in trying to out-do whom, some writers make the wildest work. There was also no studied boldness in the oratorio by way of simplicity. The songs might be objected to for their want of variety, but this might have been partly ascribable to the nature of the text selected, which was a *cento* of passages from the Prophets, strung together without any apparent wisdom or design. One or two of the airs were fine and lofty in tone, and in *cantilena* pure, if not very novel. In particular might be specified the *larghetto*, 'O Lord, behold

my affliction,' which, set off as it was by the admirable singing of Madame Viardot, had, nevertheless, great merit of its own. In its middle portion—that stumbling-block to young composers. —the treatment was felicitous, easy, and important without disproportion. Good, too, was an *aria* for the basso, 'Hear, O Lord,' most carefully sung by Signor Beletti. An unaccompanied quartette, 'Lead me, O Lord, in the way of righteousness,' executed to a nicety by Miss Louisa Pyne, Miss Dolby, Mr. Lockey, and Mr. Weiss, could but be also specified as a piece of pure part writing, solid, without dry or tiresome antiquity."* The success of the work exceeded expectation, for rumour, and something more, had decided that Dr. Pierson's oratorio was to be "the great success," and Dr. Bexfield's the "hard bargain" of the Festival. As if to show that "a prophet is not without honour, save in his own country," the attendance was miserably scanty, the hall being scarcely two-thirds full; nevertheless, "the composer was warmly received at the close of the performance, by orchestra, artists, and audience."† To these remarks the following pertinent advice was kindly added, that "if Dr. Bexfield would accept that reception as an encouragement more than a triumph, he might produce really sound, national, and characteristic additions to the stores of English music." Unfortunately the opportunity of giving heed to such encouragement as this—which Dr. Bexfield accepted with the utmost thankfulness, and with the determination to follow to the utmost of his ability—was impossible. "Death had already marked him for his own," since early in the following year the first symptoms of a fearful and incurable disease showed itself, which carried him to a too early grave

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 1039. † Id. ibid.

only a month beyond the anniversary of a success that cheered his dying hours, and incited him to persevere in his studies, although to every one but himself his rapidly approaching end was too apparent.*

Before passing from the contemplation of the promise of this gifted young man—whom I had known from his infancy, and at whose first lesson upon the pianoforte I had accidentally been present—I should be guilty of an act of unpardonable injustice and ingratitude were I not to record an act of benevolence on the part of her Majesty the Queen towards the widow and orphan children of the deceased, immediately after his death. Seeing a notice of that death in the papers of the day, her Majesty made inquiries on the instant as to the circumstances of the survivors, and finding that they were left, as she had but too accurately surmised, in absolute poverty, she caused a sum of money to be sent to them by the late Sir Charles Phipps, the keeper of the Privy Purse, that more than sufficed to cover the funeral charges, and suggested that a concert, of which she promised to become the patron, should be given in his native city, at which her own private band would gratuitously perform. It need hardly be said that her Majesty's noble suggestion was immediately responded to, the result of which was that a sufficient sum was raised by that means, conjoined with a public and private subscription, to educate and put forward his children—the last a posthumous one—who are still living and doing well.

As already intimated, "the great matter of curiosity at this

* The remains of Dr. Bexfield were interred in the new burial ground of the old parish church of Paddington, the service having been read over them by his friend, the Vicar of St. Helen's, Bishopsgate.

Norwich Festival was Dr. Pierson's *Jerusalem*," an oratorio for the success of which every machine by which it was thought possible to make a reputation had been put in motion. A large attendance, which had been withheld from "the child of the city," was guaranteed by the friends of "the stranger," and a pamphlet of analysis and preparation was written and put in circulation, with the intention and design, by means of many high assumptions, conveyed in graceful and transcendental phrases, of giving the cue to sympathy, and to prepare the world for the appearance of a new and poetical genius. The effect of these most unwise proceedings had a directly contrary effect to what was intended, for Dr. Pierson's *Jerusalem* was on all sides condemned with a unanimity that was positively painful, and to a certain extent unjust. Of the many bitterly severe criticisms that were immediately written and published, the following—on reviewing all the details of the occasion after a lapse of nearly twenty years—still seem to me to have been most within the compass of impartiality, especially as my own opinion did not altogether side with the more harsh decision, to which expression was freely given, any more than it accorded with anything like satisfaction concerning the work itself. "Generally," remarked the writer, by whose sentiments I can but abide, "it may be said that the strength of Dr. Pierson's oratorio laid in an occasional force, *brio*, and grandeur of choral effect, which, if cultivated and led up to, might have given its composer that solid reputation which scores of scores like *Jerusalem* would never win for him. Here and there, too, came an air with a good beginning, spoiled as it went on by the writer's fantastic and unauthorised method of construction. We have never heard music to which the weeding, cleaning,

and strengthening process might be so judiciously applied. It was evident either that Dr. Pierson had never studied, or that he disdained those known processes of study, the issue of which is charm, conviction, or elevation for the hearer. What was crude, puerile, and uncouth, was intermixed with the best thoughts, and obtruded in the most holy places. The voices were abused, by being called upon to sing the most desperate intervals, and phrases at variance with all received ideas of musical cadence, accent, and rhythm. The orchestra was no less cruelly strained, though the general sound was sometimes vigorous and brilliant. The modulations were not seldom harsh to impertinence. The choice and sequence of keys were more capricious than discreet. On the whole, we have rarely been so fatigued by pretensions, rarely so balked by flagrant and needless eccentricities, as in *Jerusalem;* the mysticism of the subject, and the heavy length of the work, making the above qualities by reiteration almost intolerable. Till Dr. Pierson shall practically become convinced that there is an unloveliness as immodest as the most hackneyed meretriciousness—a disorder more essentially despotic than the most prim and pedantic formality—and till he shall labour to gain the symmetry which is one element of beauty, and the nature which is secured only by attending to the laws of science, however ambitiously he may write, he must be content to be little heard, and less admired"*—a result which has been most effectually realised. "The performance at Norwich was such as could seldom be repeated, the whole *corps* of *artistes* who were engaged, with the solitary exception of Madame Fiorentini, having been included in the cast. There were some passages

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 1039.

in the music, too, which could have been executed by no existing *artiste* but Madame Viardot—so naturally ungracious were the intervals. An *arioso* was sung by that lady with so much pathos as to have been redemanded. Also a 'Hallelujah,' in which Dr. Pierson had not shrunk from direct competition with Handel, but which could have been encored only owing to some tradition that every 'Hallelujah' must merit such honours."*

Some time after this event, I had the opportunity of discussing the general purpose, and manner of fulfilling it, of Dr. Pierson's oratorio with Madame Viardot, Miss Dolby, Signor Gardoni, Mr. Weiss, and Herr Formes. The only one of these thoroughly competent musicians who could trace the smallest scintillation of genius in it was the first, who yet, with the true appreciation of a cultivated genius, unsparingly pointed out the errors of judgment, the faults of mismanagement, and the excessive exaggeration of the "manufacture—for it was little else—of most portions of the score. With regard to instrumentation, the opinion of each was that it showed the hand of a master, but that such instrumentation, when employed upon mere crudities, only served to make their deformity more disagreeably apparent. The judgment of the late Charles Lucas,† as expressed to myself on each of the Norwich Festival Oratorios, was the most conclusive of any opinion I heard—that "had Dr. Bexfield been able to have scored his *Israel Restored* with the same ability as Dr. Pierson had showed in his *Jerusalem*, and had Dr. Pierson written with the same even flow as Dr. Bexfield had maintained, something akin to a satisfactory, if not an absolutely perfect, composition might have been secured."

* See *Athenæum* for 1852, p. 1039. † See vol. i. pp. 185–87.

The Royal Italian Opera season of 1852 proved most disastrous, the loss incurred having been upwards of 15,000*l.* This was partly due to the heavy law expenses connected with the engagement of Mdlle. Wagner.* Under such circumstances, and especially as the ruin of Her Majesty's Theatre was so complete as to preclude the possibility of Mr. Lumley's opening it from 1852 to 1856, an arrangement was entered into with Mr. Arthur Henry Thistlethwayte, an officer in the Guards, by which the latter undertook to bring 12,000*l.* into the concern, in which he was to hold a third share, in conjunction, or rather partnership, with Colonel Brownlow Knox and Mr. F. Gye. The season of 1853 turned out equally unsuccessful as its predecessor in a financial point of view, whilst musically it was most disappointing. Of the three new operas brought forward—Verdi's *Rigoletto*, Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini*, and Sophr's *Jessonda*—the first was the only one that succeeded, the second having been condemned most pitilessly, and in some respects undeservedly, on the night of its presentation, and the last having "produced an impression of oppression rather than of excitement." Mdme. Bosio firmly established herself in public favour by her singing in one of Verdi's weakest creations, although her acting was utterly colourless—"a pale water-colour sketch," as it was aptly termed, of Mdme. Persiani.† Two new *prima donnas*, Mdmes. Medori and Tedesco, appeared—the former in *Maria di Rohan* and (Donna Anna) in *Il Don Giovanni*, and the latter in the *Prophète*, in the place of Mdme Viardot, the *impressario en chef* having been graciously pleased to say "that lady did not draw a shilling," although she had been the prop and mainstay

* See above, p. 250.

† See above, pp. 74 et sqq.

of the original undertaking. He, therefore, did not deem it to be to his advantage to re-engage her. Mdme. Medori was, to all intents and purposes, a genuine *artiste;* but she came to England, like very many others, much too late to give her once magnificent voice a fair chance of being heard in its integrity. It was, however, conclusive that its register had been as even as it was ample, "neither manufactured, nor managed, nor forced, and under fair, if not full, command," although its delivery was not always unimpeachable—her execution having been "of the ambitious modern school, rather than belonging to the more highly finished art of the past generation."* Her ideas of acting were founded upon the truly legitimate school, and caused her personation of the heroine in the *Maria di Rohan* to be pronounced "as unquestionably the best that had hitherto been seen or heard in England." As Donna Anna in *Il Don Giovanni*, always a crucial test, she was as equally unsuccessful as was Mdme. Bosio, who attempted the part of Donna Elvira, but showed that she had not been at the slightest pains to master a single bar of the difficult music allotted by Mozart to that most ungrateful part. Mdme. Medori then passed away, without having made the slightest mark upon the public. A similar fate befell Mdme. Tedesco, whose execution of the music of Fides in the *Prophète* was as "loose, unfinished, and deficient in phrasing, acting, and energy" as her acting was cold, listless, and unsympathetic. Her voice was, of its class, fine in quality, but it was wholly uncultivated, and by no means equal to the requirements of Meyerbeer's music, or up to the standard then prevalent at the Royal Italian Opera. Comparisons could but be

* See *Athenæum* for 1853, p. 777.

drawn between her Fides and that of Mdme. Viardot, so that what little popularity her voice gained for her in the first and second acts was completely crushed by the time the cathedral-coronation scene was reached.

On the occasion of Madame Tedesco's appearance in the *Prophète*, Tamberlik undertook the title *rôle*, Mario, from some whim or caprice, having suddenly thrown it up, never again to re-assume it. The reading of these two *artistes* was widely different from that of their predecessors, but for energy, fire, and weight that of the one was certainly more in accordance with Meyerbeer's intentions than that of the other. Tamberlik indeed made an immense stride this year in popular favour, for he commenced the season by appearing as Arnaldo in *Guglielmo Tell*—in spite of his having vowed that he never would do so, because he had been supplanted by Herr Ander* —and went on most brilliantly, improving in style and method, although without laying aside that constant *vibrato* which was his persistent fault from the beginning to the end of his career, and prevented his becoming the universal favourite he might easily have been had he striven even to modify, were it beyond his power entirely to have laid aside, so great a fault.

Signor Beletti appeared as Don Silva in Verdi's *Ernani* on Saturday, May 28th, and afterwards attempted to play Don Giovanni, but, like Ronconi,† made so miserable a failure that he never again assayed the part. He, however, took his revenge not long afterwards for his want of presence, action, and musical warmth in Mozart's *chef-d'œuvre* by giving to his version of Alfonzo XI., in Donizetti's *Favorita*, an interest

* See above, p. 243.

† See above, p. 245.

very rarely imparted to one of the most disagreeable *rôles* in the entire range of operatic characters.

Amongst the new comers of this season was Mdme. Nantier-Didiée, rather a mezzo-soprano than a pure contralto, who, in spite of her not having been favourably received, afterwards became one of the established favourites of the Royal Italian Opera, and so remained till her death. Not so, however, Mdlle. Albani—a large lady with a small voice, and no actress—who *débuted* in *Maria di Rohan*, and was heard no more.

Of M. Berlioz's *Benvenuto Cellini* and Spohr's *Jossonda*, already referred to,* it may suffice to say, that neither the one nor the other warranted the enormous expense bestowed—or rather wasted—in mounting them. As works of art there could be no comparison between them, the one being as luciously melodious, although ponderous in method, and full of the mannerisms of the great German composer's peculiar style, as the other was deficient in that quality, and overloaded with eccentricities that savoured more of trick and charlatanism than of anything resembling genius. Under every circumstance, therefore, the season of 1853 had been by no means cheering; and yet, in the teeth of pecuniary losses that were enormous, "efforts were made, though without effect, to obtain possession of Her Majesty's Theatre, on the part of the lessee of Covent Garden," † and that, too, in spite of the warning Mr. Lumley's course of action offered in trying to combine the management of his own theatre with that of "Les Italiens" in Paris!

At the second Philharmonic Society's Concert of this year

* See above, p. 269.

† *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 356.

an attempt was made to obtain a fair hearing for some of Schumann's music; an overture, scherzo, and finale being introduced, only to be "received with the almost dead silence of disapproval," and to be pronounced "a display of unattractive cacophony," whilst the prediction was hazarded, that "not many more experiments amongst this composer's works —bad, because generally ugly, and essentially meagre in every form—would be ventured in England."* Like numerous other similar predictions, the result simply of prejudice, this sweeping condemnation has not been entirely verified, although even up to this time Schumann's works are not so generally accepted as they probably may be in the future. That they will ever take rank upon the same level with those of Mozart, Beethoven, or Mendelssohn, is by no means likely; still, there is so much originality of invention, and cleverness of construction, and instrumentation, in them, particularly in his symphonies, that they will assuredly hold their ground in spite of the absence of any rich or sustained flow of melody. At the sixth concert some of M. Berlioz's compositions were given, under that gentleman's personal direction; but the "Harold" symphony, and the overture, "Le Carnaval Romain," did not pass without disapprobation—a specimen of discourtesy not at all creditable to the audience. On the other hand, compensation was, however, to a certain extent, afforded by a sacred song, entitled the "Repose of the Holy Family"—beautifully sung by Signor Gardoni—having been warmly encored.

For the musical direction of the New Philharmonic Society's Concerts, Herr Lindpaintner, a German musician of considerable celebrity, was engaged, but without any great advantage

* See *Athenæum* for 1853, p. 452.

to the undertaking, which more than ever put on the form of an individual speculation. The chief feature of the entire series of its concerts was a performance of Cherubini's Requiem at the second—a work of the highest musical importance, although, like most of the eccentric Florentine composer's "creations," by far too little known in this country. Notwithstanding that this work was for the most part meritoriously performed, and attentively listened to by a discriminating audience, it failed to make such an impression as could insure a permanent acceptance. Dr. Wylde's music to *Paradise Lost* occupied nearly the whole of the first act of the third concert of this Society; but it failed to please, more on account of the text not having been wisely selected than because of absence of melody or appropriate instrumentation. There was an absence of science in the score, especially in the overture and concluding chorus, that likewise militated against its thorough acceptance. It was on this occasion that I heard for the first time Miss Arabella Goddard play Sir W. Sterndale Bennett's Concerto in C minor, from memory, with a precision of mechanism and an accuracy of detail that indicated the largest promise of the celebrity she speedily attained, and still maintains. She had previously rendered Beethoven's grand solo Sonata (Op. 106) at the Musical Quartet Association, on Thursday, April 14th; and from the commendation that had been accorded to her for having mastered the difficulties of that intricate composition with the utmost ease, my expectations were greatly raised; in a word, it induced me indeed to expect that I should meet with one whose performance would not only be then satisfactory, but equally promising for the future. Although I was not entirely pleased with the

rendering of the Concerto above mentioned, simply on account of an absence of that expression which could scarcely have been anticipated to be present in one so young, there was more than enough of force, precision, and thorough intelligence, combined with self-reliance, that gave as large an indication of future excellence as of immediate success, from which the most favourable expectations were only to be augured. Herr Lindpaintner's connection with the New Philharmonic Society concluded with the fourth concert, when a heavy sacred Cantata, entitled the *Widow of Nain*, from his pen, was performed, but without at all obtaining any amount even of esteem. The fifth and last concerts were conducted by Spohr, but without any special coincidences to call for either remark or remembrance.

The Musical Union *matinées* of this year presented a more numerous succession of pianists than had ever previously or since been attempted. As not one of them, however, was deserving of unqualified praise, it is sufficient merely to record that they were—Master A. Napoleon, Mdlle. Gräver, Herr Haberbier, Mdlle. Staudach, Herr Blumenthal, and Herr Ferdinand Hiller. Of these I only heard the third and the last, but their performances failed to make any such impression upon my mind as to call for any special remark.

Very little comment is necessary respecting the Royal Italian Opera season of 1854, the result of which was a profit to the management, chiefly on account of four special events: the return of Mdme. Viardot to the scene of her former triumphs; the engagements of Lablache and Mdlle. Cruvelli; and a series of so-called farewell performances by Mdme. Grisi, which turned out to be no leave-takings at all, but which served both

that lady's purpose and the interests of the directors to a very considerable extent. Mdme. Viardot's engagement was chiefly remarkable for her reappearance with Tamberlik in the *Prophète;* as Donna Anna in *Il Don Giovanni;* as Desdemona in *Otello;* and in Gnecco's *La Prova d' un Opera seria.* Lablache rendered great service in the latter opera, and Ronconi's personation of the starveling-poet was an event never to be forgotten. Mdlle. Cruvelli's appearances were chiefly confined to the parts of Leonora in the *Fidelio* and Desdemona in *Otello;* which perhaps were never worse sung or acted, whilst Grisi threw her whole heart and soul into the series of characters she played, as if to show that she had by no means passed the zenith of her powers, and was as capable as ever of remaining the supreme *prima donna assoluta* of the theatre she had done so much to support. A new *seconda donna,* Mdlle. Marai, who *débuted* in *Guglielmo Tell,* and afterwards appeared in Rossini's *Matilda di Shabran,* did good service throughout the season; whilst Signor Lucchesi as a tenor, not of the highest, but still of a most useful class, rendered services that at all times were advantageous. Besides the *Matilda di Shabran,* the *Comte d'Ory*—the last comic opera of the same composer—was introduced at the fag-end of the season; but although the leading female characters were played by Mdmes. Viardot and Bosio, it fell so flat, that it has ever since been struck out of the *répertoire.* These novelties necessitated little or no outlay, and thus enabled the management, in a measure, to retrieve the heavy losses of 1852, which were augmented by the deficiency of 1853.

In 1854, Mr. A. H. Thistlethwayte was ordered out to the Crimea; but before leaving England, he executed a will,

whereby he left his share in the Royal Italian Opera equally between Colonel Brownlow Knox and Mr. F. Gye. He died in the hospital at Scutari in November, 1854, and his will was subsequently proved by Colonel Knox. On his leaving England, a fresh agreement was entered into between the then proprietors of Covent Garden Theatre and Mr. F. Gye for a new lease to the latter for ten years, from October 1853, and from that moment he assumed the sole management.

Of the Philharmonic Society's Concerts during the season of 1854 there is no need to speak, since the directors were content to rely upon many of those time-honoured works by the three great masters, which were—as they still are—acceptable to their subscribers; and these were rendered with so much precision that the complaint amongst a few of an absence of novelty really went for little or nothing; besides, it could by no means be positively said that newer works than those contained in the *répertoire* were wholly disregarded, since Schumann's Symphony in B flat was given at the seventh concert, and permitted to pass without manifestation of disapprobation, not because of its being better liked than were his other works that had been given in the previous season,* but of its having been introduced into the scheme by "command," and of its being felt that it would have been bad taste to show any hostile feeling in the immediate presence of royalty.

At the second concert of the New Philharmonic Society, Herr Ernst played Mendelssohn's violin Concerto with immense spirit, but far from perfectly with regard to truthful intonation,—a fault he never wholly overcame. Mdlle. Gräver

* See above, pp. 272, 273.

also attempted the same composer's *Serenade* and *Allegro Giojoso*, but made nothing whatever of either. Vastly different, however, was Mdlle. Clauss' interpretation of Mendelssohn's Concerto in G minor, which could not have been better rendered by any living pianist, nor even by the fingers of the genius by whose brain it had been invented. Wagner's overture to *Tannhaüser* was likewise introduced; but not being understood or at all cared for, chiefly because it was then the fashion to write that composer down—as it still is in certain quarters—it fell dead. It is something, however, to say that it was not hissed. As in the previous year, Herr Lindpaintner was the musical conductor; but on his leaving England before the series of concerts ended, Dr. Wylde—whose speculation, it began to be well understood, the New Philharmonic Society really was—presided at the concluding meeting, no answer having been given to the inquiry, "Who were the directors?" who were considered to be little else than "veiled prophets."

At the Musical Union only one novelty as a pianist, Herr Klindworth, was introduced; but Mdlle. Clauss was several times heard to advantage, as she was playing her very best, and showing immense intelligence, which was as great a characteristic in her performances as her clever and never-failing mechanism. Ernst and Molique were conjoined on one or two occasions with manifest advantage. Looking at the musical season of 1854 in all its aspects, it was certainly one of the dullest that had transpired for many years.

The Royal Italian Opera season of 1855 began with great promise, was brilliantly continued, and ended satisfactorily to the public, although anything but profitably to the management. This was the year in which the Emperor and Empress

of the French visited London, and made a state visit to Covent Garden in company with her most gracious Majesty the Queen, the Prince Consort, and various other members of the Royal family. A more brilliant night than that of Thursday, April 19th, had not indeed been witnessed in modern times. The older *habitués* contended that it was not to be compared with similar occasions at the King's Theatre in 1814 and 1815, when the allied sovereigns and other foreign celebrities were profusely and magnificently fêted, being received everywhere with the utmost enthusiasm; but all were agreed that this state visit was the next best affair of its kind to those that were given to celebrate the downfall of the first, as this was intended to celebrate the establishment of the second, Napoleonic Empire. One general note of complaint was uttered with reference to the opera selected for performance "by command," which, grand as it is, was in no single point suited to such an occasion—Beethoven's *Fidelio*. The Leonora of that night was a German *prima donna*, who came to London with a considerable reputation, being heralded as a genuine successor of Grisi—Mdlle. Jenny Ney. Unfortunately, the expectation such an announcement had raised was doomed to be disappointed; for scarcely any one whom Mr. Gye had of late engaged as a novelty turned out to be less capable of winning the approbation of his subscribers and the public. Mdlle. Ney's voice was harsh and guttural, and her method of the coarsest, whilst her figure and personal appearance were equally unattractive. Combined with an amount of nervousness that nearly prevented her either singing or acting, which the circumstances of the night of her appearance only served to aggravate, her natural defects told so cruelly to her disadvantage

that she never for an instant rose above them. That she had been an effective vocalist, after the German type, there could be little doubt; but she ought to have appeared at least ten years earlier to have had any chance whatever of "making her public" in this country. I heard her again at Dresden in the autumn of 1862, in the *Lucrezia Borgia*, when her powers were so diminished that it was scarcely possible to endure her attempt to get through the somewhat exacting music of the title *rôle*. On the occasion of Mdlle. Ney's *début* in the *Fidelio*, Formes was cast for the part of Rocco, one of the best in his *répertoire*. With his usual wrong-headedness, he had forced himself to believe that he was insulted in having been called upon to appear before the Emperor of the French, whom, as an avowed Republican, he loudly asserted, he hated with the intensest animosity. As he could not shirk his duty, he resolved, with an amount of silliness for which he was proverbial, to enter a protest, which he manifested by dressing himself very much like a Spanish matadore, and enveloping his waist in the broadest red sash that could be procured. To the general public there was no meaning whatever in this piece of absurdity, nor could they understand the continuously ridiculous pantomine by which, in constantly pointing to the red rag wrapped round him, he imagined they would perceive how disgusted he was. Behind the scenes, those who were in the secret were choking with laughter, especially as whenever he left the stage he appealed to them, whether he had not triumphantly offered insult for insult.

However, on the 26th of April a new baritone arrived—Signor Graziani—who has held his ground ever since as one of the most useful, if not one of the most polished, vocalists

Italy has of late years reared. Verdi's *Ernani* was the opera chosen for his *entrée*, the part of Carlo, as especially suited to his voice, being entrusted to him. Ere he had sung three bars it was evident that he possessed one of the most mellifluous organs with which mortal was ever blessed, although he had much of the singer's art to learn, as regarded accent, *verve*, and the power of advantageously displaying nature's rarest gifts. It was thought that, like Mdme. Bosio, he might profit by being compelled, both here and in Paris, to study other music and another manner of execution than such as had warmed and enchanted a public in Italy; but that expectation has never been realized. What Signor Graziani was in 1855 he still remains in 1872. His voice has lost little or nothing of its rich and mellow tone, but his phrasing, except in one or two songs of minor importance, remains uncouth and ungraceful, whilst his acting shows neither mind nor purpose. A favourite, however, he became from the first, and so he remains—a singular instance of what a voice can effect—with little or nothing else to recommend him.* The favourable impression Graziani had made in the *Ernani* induced the management to put him forward in another of Verdi's operas —*Il Trovatore*—a work which has been, and still is, "the rage" all over Europe,—in spite of its flimsiness in every act but the last, which is from beginning to end a direct plagiarism of Beethoven,—and has brought more money into theatrical treasuries than any other production of modern times. If Graziani had sung nothing else in this opera than the air, "Il balen del suo sorriso," as the Conte di Luna, he would have permanently established himself; yet whoever witnessed the

* See *Athenæum* for 1855, p. 593.

clumsy manner in which he "loafed" down to the footlights as the symphony of this air was being played—as he still does—could by no means have anticipated anything else than a manifestation of the most positive vulgarity, instead of hearing the beautiful voice and suave *cantabile* with which he invested that somewhat commonplace, yet not the less popular, invention. Mdlle. Ney was the Leonora of this occasion, and was singing and acting with care, according to the habit of German stage usage, but nothing more. The event of the evening, however, was Mdme. Viardot's Azucena, the part she had "created" in Paris, and one of the most remarkable performances of its time. The savage, credulous, restless Spanish gipsy, strong in her instincts, but whose reason amounts to little beyond a few broken ideas of revenge, was manifested in every word, look, and gesture. Since Pasta and Rubini left the stage, nothing of nicer vocal finish, and nothing in dramatic utterance more true and beautiful, than her delivery of the andantino, "Si la stanchezza," had ever been listened to. The Royal Italian Opera had never indeed heard such singing as hers in such music, which laid thoroughly within her compass, the middle portion of which had gained both body and sweetness. "Tamberlik undertook the part of the Trovatore, and gained ground with his audience as the opera proceeded; but his magnificent voice gave unwelcome evidence of wear and tear in its diminished resonance, when he desired to use it to advantage in the most exacting passages."

Another performance of this season, as being one of the most brilliant of modern times within my "Recollections," cannot be passed over—that of Rossini's *Il Barbiere*, on Thursday, June 14th, with Mario as Almaviva, Lablache as

Dr. Bartolo, and Mdme. Viardot as Rosina. This was indeed one of Mario's best nights, for "he sung and played to perfection," excited, it would seem, by the stupid tyrannies of Lablache, and by the brilliancy and humour of Mdme. Viardot's Rosina—the last a version entirely new to London. Perhaps the lady's *cadenzas* in the "Una voce" were over-elaborated; but, as a display of science, charm, and vocal finish, her singing of the part, as a whole, was not to be exceeded, whilst her acting was as finished and complete in its comedy as if she had been only a quiet actress, unable to play Valentine (*Les Huguenots*), Rachel (*La Juive*), Fides (*Le Prophète*), the gipsy Azucena (*Il Trovatore*), and the peasant Zerlina (*Il Don Giovanni*). Formes was the Don Basilio on this occasion, and threw a large amount of quaint humour into the part; but he sang the celebrated "Calunnia" song of the first act much too coarsely and vehemently.

Meyerbeer's *L'Etoile du Nord*, which had been produced at the Opéra Comique, Paris, in the month of April in the preceding year, and was repeated in February 1855, having been promised at the Royal Italian Opera, was brought forward on Thursday, July 19th, agreeably to the wishes of the composer, who had not only attended and superintended the rehearsals, but had rewritten a portion of the score, and made several changes that were essential in the adaptation to an Italian version. The part of Gritzenko, for instance, was considerably enlarged and "written up" for Lablache, whilst an elegant romanza, scored with the greatest felicity, was introduced for Danilowitz (Gardoni) in the third act. A terzetto for male voices, that had been omitted in Paris, was also restored. "In the account of the representation of this difficult opera—

one of the most difficult of production in existence—the chief honours were due to the orchestra, the chorus, and the *mise en scène*. The first and second were sufficiently perfect to content the most exigent of *maestri*, Mr. Costa, whilst the third was rich, tasteful, and lavish enough to have contented the most satiated of publics. Few"—if any other—"theatres in Europe could ever have presented a more superb combination than the *tableau* at the end of the second act, which was especially noticeable as displaying an attention to contrast of colour new on the English stage. Next, the two principal ladies claimed high commendation. Madame Bosio, as Catarina, looked the part charmingly, and sung its difficult music like one to whom nothing was difficult, whilst she acted better than she had ever before been seen to do. Mdlle. Marai was excellent in look, gesture, and singing, as the peasant Prescovia;" and had the two *vivandières* (Madame Rudersdorf and Mdlle. Jenny Baur) been equal to the ladies already mentioned, the entire female cast would have been unblemished.

Among the gentlemen Lablache was supreme. "A more masterly or spirited creation than that of Gritzenko was never produced, even by a young *artiste* eager to engage and win public favour, than was accomplished by the veteran *basso* when undertaking a part so comparatively secondary. His whole demeanour and delivery, especially on his appearance in the first act, as the chief of the marauding Cossacks, during the drilling of the soldiers in the second act, and in the trio of the third act, were admirable. His voice seemed to have refreshed itself for this task, and he towered above every one else with whom he was conjoined by the force, no less than by the finish, of his acting. "The singing of Formes, as Pietro, was by no

means good. Scarcely a phrase was firm in time, neither was his execution genuine, nor his intonation correct. His voice, indeed, seemed to have lost both body and roundness. His action was likewise so redundant as to become a disturbance rather than a pleasurable excitement to the audience"—a version in every respect totally different from that of M. Bataille, the original Czar of the opera, but whose manner was by no means satisfactory to myself when I saw him a short time afterwards in Paris. Indeed M. Faure's personation of that character is the only true ideal that has yet been presented; and had the Royal Italian Opera been fortunate enough to have had his services in 1855, instead of 1872, the cast might have been pronounced to have been perfect. Instead of the quiet dignity which M. Bataille manifested in large —but which M. Faure manifested in larger—proportions, there was an obtrusive vulgarity, mingled with an evident self-complacency, in everything that Formes did, which spoiled all the more important points and striking effects—"an aimless rushing to and fro—a choice of attitude neither good in itself nor successful as forming part of a group. It was like a contradiction in terms to have called so rough and riotous a person the weak point in the Coven Garden version of *L'Etoile du Nord*. Yet such was the case, and more than one difficult passage in the music, as in the story, was perilled by the prominence of his slovenly and pretending execution." * Gardoni, as Danilowitz, was graceful rather than vivacious; but he sung with a finish which foiled the coarseness of the hero, with whom he had almost always to appear in company. The minor characters being well supported helped to render the success of

* See *Athenæum* for 1855, p. 847.

L'Etoile a genuine triumph. M. Meyerbeer was twice called for with real enthusiasm at the end of the second act, and again at the close of the opera, and was greeted with such applause as is rarely heard in London. I was present, with him and Mr. Costa, after the opera, when he expressed a desire to return his thanks to the members of the band, and went with them to the private room beneath the stage. Meyerbeer had evidently arranged a very neat little speech in English for the occasion; but when he had uttered a few words he completely broke down. After a brief pause, when the applause of the band had ceased, he managed, however, to say—what was indeed more appropriate and suitable to the occasion than any "set speech" could possibly have been—"Gentlemen, the heart is so full, that the words are nowhere!" So gratified was he indeed at the moment, that he promised he would not only soon return to London, but that "he would write some new work expressly for a country so rich in executive power as our own." *L'Etoile du Nord* was played to the end of the season, alternately with the *Prophète;* but on the two or three last nights Tagliafico had to undertake the part of Gritzenko, because Lablache's engagement terminated on Monday, July 30th—the last occasion of his appearance on any stage, for he died in the following year at Naples, after a short illness, during which he was in a few hours reduced from his immense bulk to a mere skeleton. Painstaking and conscientious as Tagliafico was as the musical giant's substitute, the force of the character no longer remained, and never since has it been, nor is it ever likely to be, revived.

During a portion of the season Mr. E. T. Smith opened Drury Lane Theatre for the performance of Italian opera, after

having secured some of the "unemployed talent" which the closing of Her Majesty's Theatre had rendered available; but the manner in which the music was rendered, and the business affairs were conducted, was so slovenly, that the effort turned out little else than the decided failure that could but have been anticipated. I was quite content with having attended one performance, that of the *Sonnambula* on Monday, April 16th, when the opera was conducted by Mr. Tully—an English musician of some experience and cleverness. On that occasion Mdme. Gassier—who, as Signora Pasini, had sung at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1846 with Signors Castigliano and Bencich*—appeared as Amina, her husband being the Count, and Bettini, Elvino. The whole undertaking was but of very third-rate importance, and one could only anticipate the speedy failure that awaited it. A more composite *corps opératique*, consisting of tolerable, indifferent, and inefficient qualities, could scarcely have been brought together. The only member of the company who made any stand whatever was Signor Gassier, who, however, scarcely advanced beyond "tip-top mediocrity." "In after years, when Mr. Lumley's connection with Her Majesty's Theatre was entirely broken, Mr. E. T. Smith again became for a short period the director of that establishment; but his boldness did not command success." †

A series of attacks that for some months, about this time, had been launched against Mr. Costa, now culminated, and led to an entire change in the management of the musical department of the Philharmonic Society's Concerts at the beginning of this year. Not only had a portion of the English

* See above, p. 175.

† *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 357.

press taken this line, but several foreign critics had also adopted it. In the latter instance it assumed the form of Mr. Costa being, if not positively, yet indirectly, accused of having prevented M. Meyerbeer doing what he had never done in Paris—conducting in person *L'Etoile du Nord.* Amongst other journals, the *Musical World* had adverted to this rumour, to which M. Meyerbeer immediately offered a spirited public contradiction. The letter he addressed to that journal was so characteristic of the man, and, moreover, so generous towards Mr. Costa, that I am induced to give its more important points. Referring to the erroneous statements of the Parisian journal as having caused him much pain, he said: "Mr. Costa gave me so many proofs of zeal and devotedness during the rehearsals of *L'Etoile,* and conducted the orchestra with such admirable talent, that I am, in great part, indebted to him for the excellent execution of that opera. Besides, Mr. Costa, far from opposing himself to my directing the orchestra on the first performances, entreated me earnestly, on many different occasions, to do so. If, in spite of this, I did not comply, it is because the hearing of operas, given at Covent Garden before mine, had made me appreciate the high intelligence with which Mr. Costa conducted all the works in question; and because I could not intrust the directing of my music to hands more skilful and conscientious."*

Although it had been impossible to set M. Meyerbeer and Mr. Costa together by the ears, the resignation of the latter, as the musical director of the Philharmonic Society's Concerts, was effected. For several seasons the demand had constantly been put forward for novelty; but whenever the directors—to

* See *Athenæum* for 1855, p. 1035.

whom the preparation of the "schemes" was intrusted—listened to that call, almost, as a matter of course, blame was attributed to them for their selection. The constitution of the Philharmonic Society's band also stood in the way of Mr. Costa's obtaining such performances as he deemed to be indispensable. Many of the performers, especially among the wind instrumentalists, had grown old and incompetent; but because of their membership it was insisted that their services should be retained. When, however, it came to pass that one or two of those used-up members, who had been removed from their orchestral duties, were elected directors of the Society for 1855, Mr. Costa felt that nothing remained for him but to retire. He had saved the Society from ruin by undertaking the post of musical conductor in 1846*—which led to a rupture with Mr. Lumley—and he had brought up its performances to a pitch of excellence, unexampled in the history of musical performances, out of slovenliness and imperfection that could no longer be tolerated; yet he was placed, as it were, between two fires—a portion of the press on the one hand, which persistently assailed him; and the directors on the other, who seemed to value their old and incompetent orchestral members above everything beside—that left him no alternative but to resign, to the sorrow of those who had welcomed the progress of art which he had initiated and advanced, and to the disgust of others, who were persuaded that the cry for a change on the score of novelty—which did not satisfy when it was listened to—had been originated with the foregone conclusion that a foreign conductor was at all hazards to be got rid of. A difference had also arisen concerning the manner in

* See above, pp. 160, 173, 179.

which a composition of Mr. W. Sterndale Bennett had been conducted by Mr. Costa—the rights of which it is not within the compass of my purpose to discuss—and this had provoked a feud, the consequences of which were indeed much to be regretted, especially as partisanship was provoked that was alike injurious to two eminent men who should never have been thus thrust into antagonism, when everything ought to have been done to have constituted them friends. No friendly intervention, however, took place.

> "Discord, dire sister of the slaughtering power,
> Small at her birth, but rising every hour,"

was immediately provoked, the strife and bitterness of which was most unhappily permitted to run riot with increasing vehemence. It was believed—whether truly or not who shall venture to decide at this distance of time?—that the directors of the Philharmonic Society were themselves so divided on this matter, that all hope of their coming to an agreement as to a fitting successor seemed to be well-nigh impossible. When, therefore, the time for decision as to Mr. Costa's substitute arrived, they found themselves completely at sea. Every day brought the report before the public of some new appointment having been attempted only to have failed. First, Spohr was named as a likely person to succeed to the bâton, which remained without a hand to wield, or a mind to direct its movements. Then, in rapid succession, were Herren Hallé and Lindpaintner put forward, only to be immediately pooh-poohed; after whom M. Berlioz, of all people in the world, was spoken of; and then Mr. Charles Lucas was mentioned as likely to accept the office, if it were offered to him. Now was the discovery effectually made, how fallacious had been

"the favourite notion with a large party in the musical profession, so long as Mr. Costa was installed as head of the Philharmonic orchestra, that, could he be withdrawn, half a score of conductors as competent as himself might be found in London alone." At last, however, "a wandering whisper," as it was called, "got afloat that Herr Wagner had been sent for by the directors." Speedily this rumour proved to be no idle report, but a reality. At one of their meetings, when having discussed this difficulty until every one was weary without coming to any decision, one of the most leading and influential members of that body hazarded the question—whether in joke or earnest has never been discovered—"Why not nominate Wagner, the most rising man in Europe?" Then and there a resolution was come to, that a deputation should be immediately, in the depth of winter, despatched to Zurich, with the hope of averting the possibility of a refusal. The result was Herr Wagner's engagement; and what the reception he might anticipate would be was pretty distinctly inferred from its being immediately announced, that such an "appointment could but be regarded as nothing short of a wholesale offence to the native and foreign conductors in England, the justification of which could only be found in the quarrels of selfishness with self-interest, terminated by a joint resolution to elect the candidate whom there was no possibility of any section of amateurs or connoisseurs supporting."*

The reception which awaited Herr Wagner was thus anything but enviable, and with the first concert, which took place on Monday, March 12th, his fate was sealed. From the

* See *Athenæum* for 1855, p. 120.

very moment that he took the bâton in hand, it was perceived that all the effectiveness which Mr. Costa had been at the utmost pains to obtain was scattered and gone. That it was the same band that "master" had conducted in the past year, and that most of its members were still under his direction at the Royal Italian Opera, could scarcely be believed. It was to all intents and purposes demoralised, either of set purpose, or, which was more probable, because the differences of Herr Wagner's beat and readings were so positive that it was impossible they could be immediately understood. Then he conducted every portion of the concert by memory, without condescending to place a score before him, which—however strong the proof might be of his musical knowledge—was by no means calculated to give his forces confidence in his generalship. Every suggestion his manner of leading manifested

"Was sad by fits, by starts 'twas wild."

The audience, which was exceedingly scanty, seemed at first bewildered. They looked at one another, as if silently to inquire what it all meant. Soon, however, they began to smile, then to laugh, but at last to manifest disgust. "The most rising man in Europe"* was "tried, and found" to be miserably "wanting." Instead of improvement following upon the failure of Herr Wagner's *début*, matters only proceeded from bad to worse. The record of the disappointment of the first concert is that of every other which succeeded it; so that it was felt as a relief to every one concerned—directors, audience, and conductor—when the series came to an end. Herr Wagner was grievously offended at the criticisms—

* See above, p. 291.

unsparing enough in all conscience—that were launched against him, and was, it was said, with immense difficulty restrained, after the second concert, from throwing up his office. He had no one, however, but himself to thank for a reception that will be long remembered as one of the most unwelcome that was ever accorded to a "master" who had made for himself a name abroad. The Philharmonic Society possessed the true "traditions" of Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Weber, Mendelssohn, and every other composer of note and merit; but Herr Wagner upset them all, preferring to attempt to guide his forces by a system of exaggeration that was as fatiguing as it was whimsical, and remarkable for nothing else than inappropriate and fierce *sforzandi* and ill-mannered *rallentandi*. To their credit, the directors were at the utmost pains—ineffectually indeed—to palliate the bitterness with which he was assailed, to soothe his offended vanity, and to satisfy his wounded pride. They had made a bad bargain, and all that they could do was to make the best of it, and to resolve not to commit a similar mistake for the next season. They well nigh imperilled the existence of the Society itself; but the prognostications that it would be seen they had actually destroyed it were not verified, although a wound was so deeply and severely inflicted, that not until within the last two or three seasons could it be said that a recovery had become apparent. Yet, in spite of divisions from within and increasing competition from without, the Society "weathered a storm" from which scarcely any other institution could ever have hoped to have escaped.

Of the New Philharmonic Society it is unnecessary to preserve any record. Inaugurated with a great flourish of

trumpets, "that some of its concerts would be devoted to the purposes of charity," little came of it in the way either of pecuniary prosperity or artistic progress. M. Berlioz, who had been announced as the *probable* conductor of the series, only put in an appearance at the last two concerts, the sole musical direction of the others having fallen into the hands of Dr. Wylde, who began then to be more fully understood as "the New Philharmonic Society."

The Musical Union *matinées* likewise call for no extraordinary reference beyond a statement of the fact that they continued to draw, as they deserved, the patronage of those of "the upper ten thousand" who had the taste to discriminate as to what really deserved to be called classical chamber music, and to appreciate the finished and complete measure of its performance.

The Birmingham Festival, held, as usual, in the month of September, was remarkable for the production of Mr. Costa's first sacred oratorio, *Eli*, about which, previously to its presentation, vastly different opinions had been formed and expressed. Having had the privilege of hearing several of the "numbers," when on a visit to that gentleman in the Isle of Wight in 1854—where the greater part of the oratorio was written—and having also been present at nearly all the previous rehearsals in London, several weeks before "the event" came off at Birmingham, I was quite prepared for the entire and unequivocal success which attended its first public hearing. Mr. Costa was to have had the advantage of Madame Clara Novello's presence, for whom he had written the principal soprano part; but at the last moment that lady refused to accept the terms the Festival committee only felt

justified in offering, and Mdme. Castellan had to become her substitute, at an evident disadvantage, inasmuch as not only were her powers waning, but she was by no means qualified to give the same effect to Mr. Costa's "creation," which her more "regularly built" oratorio rival would have been able to demonstrate. Mdme. Castellan, however, did her utmost, and, if doing nothing more, made the fact thoroughly apparent how effective was every portion of the work in its construction for an *artiste* of Mdme. C. Novello's powers. With Mdme. Castellan, Mdme. Viardot was associated, and appeared to the greatest advantage in the music of the child Samuel, giving every bar of the music allotted to that character with that poetical feeling, and that refinement and measure in its expression, which ranked her amongst the few competent *artistes* of any age, whose completeness has been attested by their versatility, and whose enunciation of devotional music has never been exceeded. Mr. Sims Reeves sung the tenor part throughout with the truest loyalty, and in the war-song of the first act, "Philistines, hark!" stirred up the audience as with the sound of a trumpet. Herr Formes' delivery of the prophet *rôle* was somewhat heavy, but in some portions he manifested an amount of feeling that was scarcely to have been expected of him, and would not have been apparent had he not been severely drilled by the composer. To Mr. Weiss was allotted the second bass part, chiefly consisting of declamatory recitatives, which he delivered with due force and appropriate expression. The general remark concerning the work in its entirety was, that whilst it was brimful of the ripest and richest Italian melody, it was coloured by the most elegant instrumentation, and arranged with the utmost pro-

priety as to the subject. Several of the more elaborately worked portions of the score, especially from amongst the choruses, manifested great experience and force in contrapuntal writing, and in one trio, "Thou shalt love the Lord," a specimen of Mr. Costa's ability for working in canon came out with the greatest clearness. The "Israelites' March" caused an amount of enthusiasm rarely indeed witnessed at a sacred performance—an appreciation by no means misapplied: for to this day no specimen of martial music stirs up an audience with greater influence, or is hailed wherever it is heard—whether in the church, on the military parade, or in the concert room—with more positive evidences of satisfaction. Having been present at the performance of *Eli*, I can testify to the enjoyment it universally produced. Doubts were expressed as to its being a work that would live, and maintain the impression it originally produced. That feeling has long since passed away, for at the present day scarcely any other sacred work of modern times—not even the *Elijah* of Mendelssohn—is received with greater warmth of favour or affection. With the other circumstances of the Birmingham Festival it is unnecessary to deal. The *Eli* was *the* event of its celebration, and will remain, so long as the triennial proceedings of England's midland metropolis are recorded, as standing side by side with the previous and equally triumphant first hearing of Mendelssohn's highly dramatic oratorio, *Elijah*.*

In the last month of the year, Mdme. Lind-Goldschmidt gave two concerts at Exeter Hall, the works selected being the *Creation* and the *Elijah*. They merely served, however, to

* See above, p. 183.

demonstrate that although "the Swedish nightingale's *forte* in oratorio singing was by no means diminished, the symptoms of waning power were but too evident."

On the night of the 4-5th of March 1856, the Royal Italian Opera-house, Covent Garden, with all its contents, valued at 40,000*l.*, the exclusive property of Mr. F. Gye, was burnt to the ground. The impression that event made upon Mr. Lumley's mind was, to say the least of it, so singular that it is well worth recording. "On the 4th of March 1856," he says, "I found myself in Paris, arranging multifarious matters of business in that capital. My intention had been to stay for some time longer, and I had even made many engagements for the ensuing week. But on that day I felt unaccountably restless and uneasy. An uncontrollable impulse seemed to urge me to return to London. I reasoned with myself upon the fallacy of such 'presentiments,' but my self-created arguments against yielding to the impulse which tormented me proved insufficient to check a sudden resolve to return to England. I packed up my 'personals' hastily, and started for London by the evening mail. On the morning of the 5th of March, I arrived in town; 'I proceeded at once direct from the railway to the office of one of my legal agents—situate near to London Bridge—and was there startled by the announcement made by one of the clerks, that Covent Garden Theatre had been burnt down during the night.* Hurrying to my friends, I learned that telegraphic despatches had been sent off to me at Paris from a dozen quarters. Curious that a strange 'presentiment' should

* This catastrophe, it will be remembered, took place at the conclusion of a masked ball, given by the "Wizard" Anderson. The fire burst out even before the company had left the house, and hundreds of "masks" escaped from the rapidly invading fire, rushing with terror and shrieks into the streets.

have already brought me back! On all sides I found my friends in a state of the utmost agitation and excitement. The destruction of the rival establishment had changed, as if by the wave of a magic wand, the whole aspect of my affairs. All crowded around me with offers of assistance, in order to enable me to commence at once active measures for the reopening of Her Majesty's Theatre. Relieved from the fatal rivalry which had ultimately obtained the mastery, after having for years divided the operatic world, Her Majesty's Theatre might again, it was felt, look forward to a career of prosperity. At all events, the establishment could sail forth upon a new venture with far less chances of those sources of disaster which arose in the one formidable quarter. By this one event difficulties appeared to have shrunk into nothing. What in men's eyes had been mountains now appeared mole-hills. A friendly hand had come forward to smooth the way for the new enterprise. Interview followed interview with all the patrons and supporters of Her Majesty's Theatre, and it was powerfully urged that every possible step should be taken for the immediate opening of the establishment." *

If Mr. Lumley imagined, as he doubtless did, that with the disastrous fire which had levelled the great opposition temple of the lyric drama in Covent Garden, all opposition from that quarter in the future would inevitably cease, and that the game had returned to his own hands, he was speedily doomed to disappointment. Before the month was out the Duke of Bedford—the ground landlord—had obtained judgment in an action for the recovery of the site of the theatre, of which he took immediate possession with a view to its being rebuilt as

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, pp. 358—9.

speedily as possible. Mr. F. Gye, having also, at the date of the fire, already made numerous engagements for the ensuing season, took the Lyceum Theatre, his negociations for the possession of Her Majesty's Theatre having failed.* This step having been taken, the next thing to be done was to retain the services of those *artistes* whom he had engaged, who at once consented, as it was said, out of friendship for him as well as out of sympathy with him in the unfortunate position in which he was placed, to accept reduced salaries; but rather, in truth, with a view to the prevention of the restoration of Her Majesty's Theatre under a renewal of Mr. Lumley's management. Although foiled in his object of re-establishing one opera-house, and that upon the site of the older establishment, around which the halo of popularity to a certain extent still lingered, Mr. Lumley was not daunted by his opponent's energetic measures, but at once set to work to gather a company around him, by means of whom he could carry on the war, if not with effectual success, yet at least with so much energy and courage as could but make him "master of the situation" until the new theatre should arise, like the fabled phœnix, from the ashes of its predecessor. To Mr. Costa, "before it was known that the Lyceum was to be opened for Italian opera, Mr. Lumley had addressed proposals" once more to become the musical conductor of the older theatre; but the only reply he got was, that, "at present Mr. Gye had his word, which he" (Mr. Lumley) "knew was his bond;" although, "if any thing should happen in future, he would be willing to treat with him."† If he made advances to any of

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 359.

† Id. p. 366.

the other members of Mr. F. Gye's *troupe*—which was reported to be the fact at the time—he took nothing whatever by his motion, Beletti being the only *artiste* who "returned to his first love." So long as Mr. Costa remained with Mr. F. Gye, scarcely one amongst the company—with whom, whilst engaged in their respective duties, he bore the character of a martinet, but when loosened from such ties, was esteemed as a friend—ever so much as thought of leaving him. They would endure the misfortune and disadvantage of half-salaries rather then dissolve a connection that was alike as honourable to the one as to the other. To give "grand opera" in so small a theatre as the Lyceum was impossible; the minor range was therefore adhered to, with the exception of Donizetti's *Favorita* and Mozart's *Il Don Giovanni*. Grisi also, in spite of her previous "leave-takings," returned to aid the management in its difficulties, and worked heartily and loyally to promote its success. Only one new singer of any pretension joined the forces—Signor Neri-Beraldi—as a substitute for Tamberlik, who had not accepted a reëngagement; but the new *artiste* turned out by no means equal to his predecessor, although he became a most useful acquisition, and remained so for several seasons, as a second tenor. A Madame Devries put in an appearance, but without the slightest advantage either to herself or to the theatre. Under such circumstances, "Mr. F. Gye so far weathered his difficulties sensibly and courageously, without make-shift or complaint, or appeal *in formâ pauperis;*"* whilst Mr. Lumley had no cause to be dissatisfied with the patronage accorded to him. That the latter really deserved the favour he met with for his energy and

* See *Athenæum* for 1856, p. 968.

perseverance cannot be denied. Under the pressure of enormous difficulties he rapidly brought a working company together; and had less fuss been made about what had been done when the season terminated, "the curtain might have been allowed to fall" without any very severe remark or comment. Mdlle. Wagner, whose services were secured, notwithstanding all the loss and annoyance she had caused in 1852,* never fully penetrated the public.† Although her own conduct—and especially that of her father, who had insolently written that "England was only to be valued for her gold"—was condoned, and she was at first warmly received, she paled before the greatest impostor that ever presumed to present herself before an intelligent musical audience as a *prima donna*—Mdlle. Piccolomini—who, by dint of sheer impudence, managed to lead the *habitués*, and a very large portion of the public, by the nose. As for singing, she had not an idea of what the meaning of that accomplishment really was. She could no more sing a scale than she could move the Monument! If it had not been an insult to common sense, whenever she came in contact with a difficulty, the manner of her shaking her little head, making a dash at it, and then scrambling helter-skelter through it, would have been amusing. There was one thing, however, very much to her credit—that she never denied her incapacity, but rather honestly and conscientiously admitted the fact. On one occasion she was known indeed to have said, "They call me little impostor, and they gives me bouquets, and applauses, and moneys; why not be a little impostor?" She, however, proved "a great card" to

* See above, p. 250.

† See *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 384.

Mr. Lumley during the seasons of 1856-7, and was the chief means of his keeping the doors of Her Majesty's Theatre open. Of the entire company Mr. Lumley really produced only three *artistes*—Madame Alboni and Signors Beletti and Calozolari; and the exhibition of these, the production of *La Traviata*, the triumphs of Mdlle. Piccolomini, the reception of Mdlle. Wagner, and the unaccountable disappearance of Madame Albertini, after a *début* apparently as triumphant as any one of the others,—made up a tale of "musical dearth and imperfection" * which no semblance of popularity could overcome.

Mr. W. Sterndale Bennett this year undertook the onerous duties of musical director of the Philharmonic Society's Concerts, concerning which I now cease to speak in detail, since it can by no means be said that the results that were expected from this appointment were realised. Previously to this accomplished musician and elegant composer assuming so responsible a position, there had been an incessant clamour for novelty going on in every direction. Unable to meet that demand to anything like the extent insisted upon, the directors ventured very slowly indeed upon making any change, chiefly in consequence of the invariable result—that whatever they presented was sure to meet with the most determined condemnation. Before Mr. W. Sterndale Bennett took up Mr. Costa's duties, for the adequate performance of which Herr Wagner had, on all hands, been denounced as wholly incompetent, it was determined to attempt to appease those whom, as events transpired, it was found to be impossible to satisfy. Five concerts "dragged their slow length along," without any remarkable incident occurring in any respect worth recording; but at the sixth an

* See *Athenæum* for 1856, p. 968.

effort was made, which well-nigh demolished the Society out of hand—the performance of Schumann's Cantata, *Paradise and the Peri*, with Mdme. Lind-Goldschmidt as its interpreter-in-chief, by which an entire evening was occupied, and to all intents and purposes wasted. Mdme. Schumann,* who had appeared at the second concert, as well as at the second *matinée* of the Musical Union, and proved herself to be a *pianiste* of the highest class, with a brilliant finger producing the richest and most even tone, and a facility of execution that was only equalled by her taste and style, was present on this occasion, not amongst the audience, where her presence would have obtained for her both respect and sympathy, but actually upon the orchestra, immediately in front of the conductor, to

* Mdme. (Clara Joséphine) Schumann, the widow of Robert Schumann, was the daughter of Frederick Wieck, and was first known as an accomplished pianiste under her maiden name. She was born at Leipsic, September the 13th, 1819, and at five years of age commenced the study of the pianoforte under the tuition of her father. She attracted the attention of Paganini in 1829, who thought highly of her talents and prognosticated her future eminence. Having travelled through the principal cities of Germany, she arrived at Paris in April 1839, and created a great sensation there. After giving concerts at Berlin and Wiemar she married Robert Schumann, who had been a pupil of her father's and a resident in his house. In 1844 she went to Russia, and to Vienna in 1846, with her husband, and then settled at Dresden. The death of Robert Schumann imposed upon her the necessity of working for the maintenance and support of her children; and this duty she has fulfilled with the utmost perseverance, assiduity, and affection. She has been an established favourite in England ever since her first coming, and is year after year heard with unflagging attention and renewed enthusiasm, whenever she returns for the duties of a musical season. She resides, when unoccupied with professional engagements, in a humble dwelling at Baden-Baden, and pursues her studies there with as much patience, determination, and earnestness as when, in her childhood, she was unremitting in the fulfilment of a system of practice which has made her the accomplished artiste she is universally admitted to be. For a full detail of Mdme. Schumann's career, see Fétis's *Biographie Universelle des Musiciens*, tom. vii. pp. 531-2.

whom she gave from time to time directions, which he communicated at second hand to the orchestra and vocalists! If the lady herself were so devoid of good taste as not to have perceived that she was entirely out of place in this position, the directors at least ought to have saved her from herself by insisting upon her absence. If they had, however, requested her presence, they were doubly culpable. From this and various other circumstances, it was impossible for either band, principals, or chorus to be at their ease. As for the conductor, he was much more puzzled than complimented by an interference that suggested incompetency on his part, and a positive inability to guide his forces without superior direction. There could be no doubt of the fact, that not a single hearer carried away one note of the music to which he had been for several hours listening. The whole affair was as crude as it was extravagant, whimsical, and unintelligible, overloaded with caprice, and totally devoid of the ghost of a melody. The performance, under so many disadvantages, was, moreover, as indifferent as could well be conceived. Mdme. Lind-Goldschmidt's voice, worn and strained as it already was, seemed to be more fatigued and unequal than it had ever been before; and thus she was unable to fight through "a part which demanded more power in the lower register than she could possibly impart to it." The other singers—Mdmes. Weiss and Lockey, Messrs. Benson, Montem Smith, and Lawler—did all they possibly could with music as unsympathetic as ever had been written; but, beaten at the outset, they one and all went through what was set down for them correctly enough, but without a spark of animation. The coldness with which the entire performance was received was fearfully disheartening;

but to no one could it have been more distressing than to Mdme. Schumann herself, who could but be aware of "the disappointment and aversion of the audience, whilst she had to endure the pain of witnessing a defeat" that would have been confirmed by the most vehement demonstrations of derision, had not the audience been restrained by the presence of Royalty.

During the whole of the season of 1856, Mdme. Schumann continued to hold the very first position as a *pianiste* of the highest mark, being engaged at the New Philharmonic Society's concerts, as well as at those of the older institution, the Musical Union, and many other *réunions*. Miss Arabella Goddard was likewise conspicuously brought before the public on her return from Germany, on which account comparisons between Mdme. Schumann and herself were unwisely drawn, and with but a small amount of fairness or consideration for either the one or the other. The younger of the two was rising rapidly into fame: the other had already risen. To have pitted them therefore, against each other, whilst it was most injudicious, could but cause an amount of bitterness to arise, as painful as it was undesirable.

CHAPTER VIII.

1857—59.

If the revival of the long-suspended action of Her Majesty's Theatre had in the previous year been attended with less success than had been anticipated, the opening of the season of 1857 augured even more brilliantly—that is, supposing it had been possible to accept Mr. Lumley's announcements as deserving of credit. That those announcements were for the most part believed, may, however, be taken for fact, inasmuch as on Tuesday, April 14th, there was scarcely a nook unoccupied. The *habitués* that of yore were wont to be recognised were again seen in their old familiar places, whilst the associations of past times were revived with a zest which none but such individuals could appreciate or understand. Expectation had, doubtless, brought a large portion of the audience together; for the opening of 1857 was to be inaugurated with the appearance of several "stars" that had long shone in the continental horizon, but as yet had not displayed any of their brilliancy in our colder hemisphere. But a vast proportion of the audience were gathered together, as a matter of course, to evince their interest in the future well-being of the establishment, and to greet the second year's efforts to reconstitute Her Majesty's

Theatre, as it once was, a permanent home for the rendering of purely Italian opera.

The work produced on this occasion was Donizetti's *chef-d'œuvre, La Favorita*, which—written by that successful composer when he was at the zenith of his fame, for the Grand Opéra of Paris—has ever since been given in every great theatre of continental celebrity with increased success, and received with unwavering satisfaction. The leading female *rôle*, Leonora, was given to an unknown *prima donna*, Mdlle. Spezia, who had been spoken of in high terms of praise by most of the continental critics, and who now came to claim, if not to win, the same good opinion from a London public. Although this lady was almost overwhelmed by nervousness on her *entrée*—which to a great extent marred her prospects of success—she very speedily made it felt that she had fair pretensions to the opinion which had been elsewhere given of her. Her voice, though she was still young, had evidently suffered from the frightful wear and tear to which Verdi's music exposes all singers who are rash enough to become its interpreters. Nevertheless, her manner was good, when she did not strain after effect, and so long as she was content to rely upon purely level singing. The quality of her tone was somewhat metallic, and therefore occasionally harsh; yet it was resonant and full, and when not overpowered by the band—which was much too often the case—made its way to the extreme corners of the house. In flexibility it was perhaps a little deficient; yet one could but wish to abstain from giving a decided opinion on that point, until she had been heard in another opera, when undoubtedly, from the success she gained on her *début* she might obtain greater confidence than could be expected on the trying

occasion of appearing before so critical an audience as that of Her Majesty's Theatre was supposed to be. In figure Mdlle. Spezia was short and slight, with a face not absolutely beautiful, but most expressive for histrionic purposes. Her acting was, for the most part, intelligent and judicious, with, however, a slight tendency now and then to exaggeration. In the last act of the opera, when so much is demanded of the *prima donna*, she reminded her hearers very much of Mdme. Stolz,* and showed undoubted characteristics of talent and an intelligent appreciation of the situation.

In Signor Giuglini† I must confess to have been somewhat disappointed. His voice was a pure Italian tenor, with considerable flexibility, and a most happy blending of the head and chest notes, but it was rather light than robust in quality, and when put to its utmost stretch, failed to produce those

* See above, p. 150.

† "Giuglini began his professional career in the choir of the metropolitan church of Fermo (Ascoli-Piceno), and was destined, it is said, for an ecclesiastical career. His excellence, first as a treble, and afterwards as a tenor, attracted general notice, and soon every temptation was offered to induce him to appear upon the lyrical stage. He firmly resisted, till accident effected what persuasion could not accomplish. A member of the orchestra of the Fermo theatre happening to fall ill, Signor Giuglini took his place at a moment's notice, and shortly afterwards rose from the band to the boards, in consequence of the illness of the principal tenor. His success as Jacopo in *I due Foscari* at once lifted him above the chance of rivalry in the eyes of the Fermo public; and after a series of brilliant successes at various theatres, he achieved at Milan his last great triumph prior to his London engagement. The Emperor of Austria was so highly gratified by his performance in the Lombard capital, that he not only nominated him chamber-singer of his court, but was desirous to secure his services at the Vienese opera." Mr. Lumley had, however, engaged him for three years; "but still the court was determined that the Austrian capital should not entirely lose so bright an oraament, and accordingly he was at once secured in advance for the year 1860." See *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 406.

startling effects for which Rubini, Tamberlik, and even Mario, had always been so largely effective. It was a voice of the Calzolari and Gardoni class, very manageable and pure in intonation, and capable of producing pleasing results. Signor Giuglini's singing of the exquisite romanza of the last act, "Spirto gentil," proved him to be an accomplished *artiste*, whilst its unanimous re-demand, most heartily expressed, secured the success which was promised from the opening of the opera, and placed him in the foremost rank of modern Italian tenors. Signor Vialetti *débuted* as a *basso profondo* in the character of Baldassar, but did not produce any great sensation. He had a full deep voice, but his manner was rough, and at times his intonation was not of the truest. Signor Beneventano played the *rôle* of the king, and manifested many qualifications that might have made him a great singer, if he had only been at the pains to study patiently and assiduously. His tone was metallic, and his manner very rough; but he might have taken a very high rank if he would but have done his best to restrain his energies, and to hold his voice under due management and control. The little part of Inez was intrusted to Mdlle. Ramos, a *débutante* from Turin, who showed symptoms of becoming a really valuable *seconda donna*. The chorus was tolerably steady, but the band was —like its new conductor, Signor Bonetti—much too demonstrative. It completely drowned the voices again and again, and exhibited an utter disregard of light and shade. There were all the elements of a first-rate band at Signor Bonetti's command, but the performers had to learn that they were subservient to the singers, and not intended to overwhelm them—a result they never once accomplished during the whole season.

Immediately that Mdlle. Piccolomini arrived, she appeared in the *Traviata*, when Giuglini undertook the part of Arturo, and increased the favourable opinion he had already made. After this, he sang in the *Lucia di Lammermoor*, the *Trovatore*, *I Puritani*, *Il Don Giovanni*, and rapidly mounted in public appreciation to the highest point he ever was able to attain. As an actor he made no way, since of histrionic talent he did not possess a particle; but this was forgiven, because of the beauty of his voice, which acted upon the ear with an amount of fascination that almost wholly disarmed criticism. So much, indeed, was this the case, that the somewhat exaggerated praise was permitted to pass almost unchallenged—that "he was at once acknowledged as a tenor unsurpassed, if not unrivalled, since the days of Rubini, and took at once the highest position attainable by vocal talent."* Mdlle. Ortolani—now Madame Tiberini—whose appearance, on Tuesday, April 28th, was proclaimed as a success unprecedented since the *début* of Grisi,† failed to obtain the good opinion of such hearers as were not likely to be satisfied with mere mediocrity, or amused with the trials of unfinished executants. Could applause have made a success, Mdlle. Ortolani would undoubtedly have won as genuine an evidence of a satisfactory reception as had ever been witnessed within the walls of Her Majesty's Theatre; but it was got up, and was as insincere as it was dishonest, besides being so overdone, that its dissimulation was palpable enough to be little else than disgusting. It had its just reward almost immediately; for no singer of either the older or the newer times ever more thoroughly "fell through" with the public, or became more conspicuously discarded. Mdlle. Ortolani fought bravely

* See *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 406. † See vol. i. pp. 287, et sqq.

against the public disinclination to listen to her; but Mr. Lumley, by his practice of puffing and habit of getting up applause that turned out to be fictitious, put aside all chance she might have had, if pretension to familiarity had been less prominent, and if the second-rate character of her ability had been admitted.

Amongst the other "novelties" upon whom Mr. Lumley relied for great results, Signori Corsi and Bélart were the most conspicuous; but the former, although a fairly average *artiste*, never won any consideration; and the latter, who had a delicate voice and a satisfactory method, died too soon to establish the "future" which seemed to be before him. The season was both musically and financially a failure. The quarrel that had sprung up between Lord Ward, the new lessee, and Mr. Lumley, was becoming more and more intensified, with not the slightest prospect of being even suspended.

At the Royal Italian Opera, Mr. F. Gye commenced his season under considerable disadvantages, in having been compelled once more to find a home for his *troupe* at the Lyceum. It was generally supposed that Drury Lane would have been at the service of the Royal Italian Opera company; but at the last moment the selfishness of the renters of that theatre drove the *entrepreneur* to refuse to meet their extravagant demands, and to throw himself upon the support and good-will of the public in his difficulty. It was, however, promised that ere another season arrived, a home worthy of his celebrated *corps operatique* would be erected, when those matchless specimens of grand opera, for which Covent Garden had been so famous, would be revived in all the splendour and brilliancy of former times. Pending that result, the subscribers and the public

were fain to be content with the lighter works that had to be presented, and to enjoy them as the most perfect presentations of that class of lyric performance which had ever been witnessed anywhere in the world. There was at the Lyceum a combination of talent in every department of the highest character which the musical world had ever seen congregated together. First, there was a company unrivalled in talent and capability, consisting of voices that have never been equalled, and certainly never will be surpassed; next, there was a chorus perfect in its organisation, made up of tried vocalists, who were good actors no less than capable singers; then, there was an orchestra that was *facile princeps*, containing as it did the most skilled and accomplished instrumentalists; and last, though by no means least, there was Mr. Costa as the conductor, whose reputation remained unrivalled, and whose talent was admitted to be *unique*, in whatever department of music he was called upon to officiate and preside. The minor appointments were also of a most effective character, rendering the *ensemble* as finished and complete as could possibly be desired. From such materials nothing but success was to be obtained; and of this scarcely a person could fail to be convinced, that contracted as the sphere of operations could but be, from the comparative smallness of the Lyceum Theatre, the seasons of 1856 and 1857 will always be spoken of as among the most finished and complete specimens of lyric performance which have been witnessed, either at home or abroad.

The opera selected for the opening night, Tuesday, April 14th, was Bellini's well-worn *I Puritani*, the reminiscences of which were of the most grateful and genial character. The incomparable Diva (Grisi) willingly resumed the *rôle* of the

heroine, and though no longer what she once had been, she yet remained as far above all her compeers as ever. The small Lyceum Theatre was admirably suited to her voice, and never did she evince greater proofs of the care with which she husbanded her resources, and preserved her peculiarities of excellence and skill, than on this occasion. It was the decided opinion of the entire audience that there was still but one Grisi, and devoutly was it hoped that, so long as she could sing as she then did, she would not repeat the retirement of the two previous years, but would continue to grace the Royal Italian Opera with her presence and support for many seasons to come. Gardoni and Graziani were suffering from severe cold, but they sung with their wonted excellence, and contributed largely to the enjoyment of the opening night. Tagliafico was as painstaking and useful as ever, and Polonini received a cheer of welcome that was as well deserved as the compliment was graceful and appropriate. A more exquisite performance of this elegant opera could hardly have been given, and the enjoyment of the audience was again and again most unmistakably signified.

On Thursday evening, April 16th, Bellini's *Norma* was given, with Grisi as the heroine, who proved that however worn her voice might have been with long service, she was still incomparable in that particular line of character. She played with all her usual energy and fire, and gave the *morceaux*, with which the *rôle* is full, with that *abandon* and good taste for which she was unrivalled. Gardoni played the disagreeable part of Pollio, and added another laurel to those he had already so well earned. Mdlle. Marai made her *rentrée* as Adelgisa, and sang with her usual discrimination and ability.

Tagliafico's Oreveso was a little out of his line, but he avoided offending against good taste.

The only other event of the Royal Italian Opera season worth recording—for which, however, a very few words will suffice—was the appearance of Miss Balfe, a daughter of the eminent composer of that name, as Amina in the *Sonnambula*. The choice of such a part was not altogether wise or judicious; for comparisons could not fail to be drawn between so great a novice as this young lady was, and the many *artistes* of the first class by whom it had been sustained, from Pasta downwards. Miss Balfe's manner on the stage was easy, refined, and naturally dramatic, and evinced spontaneous impulses of large promise. Her voice—a mezzo-soprano of about two octaves in compass—was expressive rather than powerful, but neither meagre in quality nor wooden in *timbre*. She had been well taught, and had not been forced before the public, as so many would-be *prima donnas* had then and have since been, before she had mastered the rudiments of her education. She was, however, too well received—so much so, indeed, that it turned her head, and made her so vain and presuming, that her more competent contemporaries could but take offence at the airs and graces she gave herself. She did not remain very long, however, upon the stage, since she married Sir John Crampton, the English ambassador at St. Petersburg, very early indeed in her career, from whom, a few years afterwards, she was divorced, when she again entered into matrimony with a Spaniard of distinction, the Duc de Frias, and died in Madrid a short time since.

On Thursday, May 21st, a lady was brought forward who has since made her way both at home and in America—in

spite of prognostications that she would merely "prove an acquisition as a *comprimaria*"*—and remains one of the most intelligent and legitimate of our modern English female *artistes*—Mdlle. Parepa—the "exhausted" *Puritani* being the opera chosen for the occasion. Admitting that Mdlle. Parepa had much to learn, there was a certain freshness about her voice that was full of promise, and a method that clearly enough showed her training to have been in a thoroughly pure school, as might have been expected on account of her relationship to the Seguin family, who had been for so many years associated with the Italian opera-houses. Mdlle. Parepa was wise enough to understand that, much as she had then accomplished, much more was to be attained. She knew that she was but a novice, and she resolved to become a proficient. In this she has succeeded, the only cause of regret concerning her being that she has passed far too many years away from home, in America, where she is an immense favourite, and where she will probably eventually settle. When she went away from England to the United States, she left the post of first English operatic and concert singer unoccupied, into which no one has yet stepped. She, indeed, has been a rare instance of a singer coming home, after a lengthened absence, to resume her former place in her art, and to be accepted—as she deserves to be—with all the warmth which, from the night of her *début*, has everywhere been accorded to her. Although I am not intending to write my "Recollections" of the last five or six years, I cannot refrain from making this passing reference to a lady who merits the esteem of all who know her for her amiability of disposition, as well as their approbation for those

* See *Athenæum* for 1857, p. 669.

artistic qualities which have given her fame, and, as I am informed, fortune likewise. Mde. Parepa has been twice married, first to the late Mr. Carvill, and next to Herr Rosa, a German violinist of great ability, who was Conductor of the English Opera Company in America.

At the third concert of the Philharmonic Society—Monday, May 18th—M. Rubenstein, who had been heard, as a mere lad, in 1842,* appeared as a pianist in two compositions of his own. That this gentleman was a greater player than a composer there could be no question; but he was not so accepted by a large class of persons, and was treated with scant courtesy by some portion of the press. That he was really a genius—as many persons then believed him to be—has since been proved by the strides he has made, and by the receptions he has had in all parts of Europe, where real talent is sure to meet with encouragement, and to be rewarded with success. Partisanship in London did M. Rubenstein harm. He had the misfortune to arrive at a time when a musical feud was in full force, and he suffered from its effects—so much so, indeed, that it has only recently been reported that he has never recovered from the painful impressions which the severe criticism his pianoforte-playing and compositions called forth made upon a somewhat sensitive mind. Whether this be true or not, M. Rubenstein ought to be too high-spirited to be any longer annoyed by such reminiscences. Whenever he afterwards came to England, he met with kindness and consideration, which should have disarmed every feeling of resentment; for, after all, grand and magnificent as his method was, it was by no means free from objection. So great was his strength

* See above, p. 141.

of hand, that he was too often induced to use it like a giant, and thus was open to the charge that "he bullied the pianoforte." But when he gave himself up to a more moderate manner, then exception could scarcely be justly taken to his performances. I have heard him play with such vehemence and roughness, that I trembled lest every string of the instrument would snap asunder; and then I was as ready to denounce him as every one possessed of a particle of taste could not fail to do. Yet not long afterwards I have sat and listened to his *cantabile* playing as if under a spell of fascination; and here it was that he showed himself to be really great. His impulse too often carried him out of this line; but whenever he came back to it, it must have been a churlish disposition indeed that would not have forgiven him for his exceptional eccentricities. Besides, he was somewhat whimsical in his reading of the well-known pianoforte works of the great masters, especially of Beethoven, whom at times he all but murdered; whilst, again,—though I must admit it was but seldom,—he would produce a meaning which one's own feelings at once indicated could but have been the right one, whether positively intended by that great "tone poet" or not. That M. Rubenstein could please the Philharmonic subscribers, on the occasion of his first or other appearances, was not to be expected. The larger number of those persons moved in an antiquated groove, and disliked everything outside or beyond it. It was at the Musical Union where he played his best and was most admired; for there he met with a warm and enthusiastic friend in Mr. John Ella, who stood by him then, as he does to this hour, with unflinching tenacity and unswerving friendship.

The fifth concert of the Philharmonic Society—Monday,

June 7th, afforded M. Rubenstein another opportunity of playing before its subscribers and members, the chief feature of his performance being Weber's well-known "Concert-Stück." Like all his playing, this was a marvellous specimen of manipulation, but far from being agreeable. The lights and shades were scarcely marked at all, and the frightful railroad pace at which the last *motivo* was taken made it a thorough scramble, though it is but fair to M. Rubenstein to say that, with all his dash and rapidity, every note was distinctly given, without the slightest slur or omission. As a specimen of what human fingers can accomplish it was wonderful, but far from satisfactory. The playing, however, of the four selected pieces in the second part, each of a different school, altogether compensated for the failure of the Weber concerto. In these distinct specimens of four various manners—a, "Nocturne," Field; b, "Lied ohne worte," Mendelssohn; c, "Gigue," Mozart; d, "March from the Ruins of Athens," Beethoven—M. Rubenstein showed himself to be a thorough master of the pianoforte, and, furthermore, to be possessed of intense feeling, and able to give the fullest expression to a delicacy and refinement which never would have been supposed, had he left the orchestra after the Weber concerto, and appeared no more.

But for the fortunate engagement of Mdlle. Titiens* by Mr.

* Titiens (Teresa) is of Hungarian origin, and was born at Hamburg in 1834. The right spelling of her name is Tietjens, but it was changed by Mr. Lumley, to assimilate it with that of the famed Painter, Titian. The sweetness of her voice having attracted, whilst she was a child, the notice of a professional teacher, her parents resolved to have her educated for a musical career. After the requisite courses of study, she made her first appearance at Hamburg in 1849, in the title *rôle* of Donizetti's *Lucrezia Borgia*, and at once established her claim to a distinguished position on the lyric stage. She proceeded to Frankfort, and thence to Vienna, gaining increased reputation in each city. On April 13th, 1858, she appeared at Her

Lumley for the season of 1858, it is indeed doubtful whether he would have been able to have opened Her Majesty's Theatre any longer. That lady, however, proved to be "the best card" that had ever turned up for him; and, but for the insuperable financial difficulties with which he was environed, would have done more towards pulling him through than a hundred Piccolominis could have accomplished. Here was indeed a genuine *artiste*, who, if she had only been taught after the Italian instead of the German method, would have been the greatest *prima donna* that had ever been heard—or heard of—since operatic music had sprung into existence. Even in the absence of that method, she has held her ground as incomparable; and at the present moment, when her voice is approaching its decadence—and no wonder, because of the wear and tear it has undergone, and the all but superhuman labours its possessor has undertaken and compassed, with an indomitable spirit and perseverance that nothing has ever daunted—there is not a single *artiste* that approaches her within the "shadow of a shade," or to take her place whenever she may retire. As in other times first-class *prime donne* have come and gone, so it may be again; but at present the world looks in vain for such a one as Mdlle. Titiens has been, and as it is to be hoped for many seasons yet to come she will remain. It may suffice to say that Mddle. Titiens *débuted* as Valentine in *Les Huguenots*, before the Queen and court and an overwhelming audience, on Tuesday, April 13th, when Giuglini

Majesty's Theatre, as Valentine in *Les Huguenots*, since which time she has held the highest position to which a *prima donna* can attain. "The great line which commenced with Catalani, was continued by Pasta, and sustained in all its honours by Schröder-Devrient, Malibran, and Grisi, has found no feeble vindication in the genius of this gifted lady." See *Men of the Time*, pp. 783-84.

played Raoul, the music of which lay ill for his voice, and for which his action was unsuited. With the exception of these two parts, and that of St. Bris by Beletti, the cast of the opera was little else than contemptible; yet the performance of the band and chorus was much worse, and the less that is said about the *mise en scène* the better. Mddle. Titiens's next achievement was in the *Lucrezia Borgia*, in which the strength of her voice told with better effect than her acting; for she had not then made the title *rôle* one of the best features of her *répertoire*. The only real novelty that Mr. Lumley ventured to mount and bring forward was Verdi's *Luisa Miller*. This was given on Tuesday, June 8th, the result of which was unequivocal failure; for dull and mawkish as is the work itself, Mdlle. Piccolomini had not the slightest pretension to have been thrust into the leading character, and Mdme. Alboni made nothing of the small part of the Duchess Fredrica, although she evidently tried to do so, by substituting a *cavatina* for the original duet of the opera. Giuglini alone was appreciated, the music being somewhat suited to his style; but he began to manifest the bad taste of relying upon long breaths, loud A's, and other meretricious devices, instead of singing legitimately and sensibly. Beneventano, Vialetti, and Castelli, who undertook the other parts, trenched so closely upon the grotesque, that they produced amusement rather than pleasure. In spite of its being said that *Luisa Miller* had thoroughly succeeded, its immediate withdrawal from the bills positively enough proved the contrary. Upon Mr. Lumley's own confession, "it lingered, hoping for success against hope, and then fled to return no more."*

* *Reminiscences of the Opera*, p. 442.

Saturday, May 15, 1858, will ever remain one of memorable interest as connected with the progress of the Royal Italian Opera; for on that night the new theatre, which replaced the old house, mercilessly destroyed by fire, was opened, and pronounced to be "perfect in all its parts, and most honourable to the architect, Mr. E. Barry (a son of Sir Charles Barry) and Messrs. Lucas & Co., the builders." The opera selected for the occasion was that which had so continuously in previous seasons served its interests well and worthily, *Les Huguenots;* and most superbly was it presented, with the combined talent of Mesdames Grisi, Nantier-Didiée, Marai; Signori Mario, Tagliafico, Zelger, and Polonini; Mr. Costa conducting with his usual tact, spirit, and energy the combined forces, which numbered an orchestra of eighty-seven picked players, and a chorus largely invigorated by the infusion of fresh blood. The costumes, entirely new, were correct and appropriate; whilst the scenery, by Mr. Beverley, was of the best. Owing to much that is always left undone until the last moment in every new undertaking in England, the public could not be admitted until more than an hour beyond the usual time of performance; so that indeed many went away, under the firm conviction that the doors would not be opened at all. Those who believed in the promise of the inauguration of this splendid new lyric temple, that had arisen, as if by magic, from the ground in six months' time, waited patiently, and were rewarded by as creditable a performance of Meyerbeer's opera as could ever be witnessed in this or any other country. Not for many years past had Mario been heard to such advantage, so full and fresh was his voice throughout the entire performance, but especially so at the close of the celebrated *septuor* of the second (third)

act, which he delivered in perfect tune with the force of a trumpet. Grisi was likewise in thoroughly good humour; and every other member of the company—in all of whom an *esprit de corps* was most positively prominent—strove to make each point tell with the utmost precision. "The excusable delays of the evening, however, drove everything so late, that at the end of the third (fourth) act"—the great scene between Valentine and Raoul—"it was found advisable to drop the curtain and sing the National Anthem, leaving the fourth (fifth) act for the next performance, to the dissatisfaction of only a small portion of the audience." Thus, "after all that had been said and hoped to the contrary, the most splendid temple for musical drama which England has ever possessed was most auspiciously opened." The only drawback to the gratification of the evening was the absence of Mr. F. Gye, by whose energy the undertaking had been completed; but, worn out by mental anxiety and incessant labour, "he thoroughly succumbed at the last moment to illness, so severe as entirely to preclude the possibility of his being present on an occasion in which there was honest cause for his finding a real triumph."

Under the circumstances of everything having to be provided afresh, no new work was attempted. The *Traviata* was exceedingly well given, with Madame Bosio and Signors Gardoni and Graziani in the leading parts, a few nights afterwards; and this was speedily followed by the *Lucrezia Borgia*, which was rendered remarkable by the appearance of Ronconi as Don Alphonso, on his return from America—a part of which he made as much in every respect as he had hitherto done of Chevreuse and Iago. As an instance of the genuine artistic spirit of this *artiste*, before coming to London—although wearied with

his voyage across the Atlantic—he went all the way to Ferrara to inspect a portrait of the celebrated man he was about histrionically to represent, in order that his costume might be exactly correct. It was so in every particular; but it was so strange a specimen of the male dress of the period in which the Borgias disgraced humanity, that it was generally disliked. Ronconi, however, adhered to it for the season, and always afterwards when he played the character. The poisoning scene of the second act was, "taking it for all in all," one of the greatest specimens of representative power and grandeur that could be witnessed. Scarcely, however, had this gifted *artiste* ceased to produce the deepest emotion, by the manner in which he treated the character of Don Alphonso in the *Lucrezia Borgia,* than he convulsed another audience with laughter by his appearance as the travelling English nobleman in Auber's sparkling *Fra Diavolo,* for which opera that composer had expressly written a series of elegant recitatives, in place of the spoken "words" of the original French version, and a trio in the first act for the Brigand *en chef* and his two rascally accomplices; the former of whom was admirably played and sung by Gardoni, and the latter with an amount of fun, spirit, and originality by Zelger and Tagliafico, thoroughly characteristic of the class of low Italian life intended to be portrayed. Madame Bosio did not make much of the pleasing part of the heroine, so far as acting was concerned; but she sang the music charmingly. Mdlle. Marai was respectable, but nothing more, as the "nagging" English "My lord's" *cara sposa;* but so ridiculous was Ronconi, and so thoroughly determined to draw from every one about him shouts of laughter, that she could not keep her countenance or sing her music correctly. Who will

ever forget this "master of his art," on his first appearance, clothed in a nankeen travelling suit, a glass in his eye, a Skye terrier under one arm, and a roll of shawls upon the other? All this was *en caricature*, no doubt; but there was genuine fun in it, and of such a species as thoroughly proved how gifted Ronconi was—like Garrick of old—both in tragedy and comedy.

During the season Madame Viardot, who had been strangely overlooked by the directors of both the opera-houses, was playing at Drury Lane; but the company with whom she was associated was by no means worthy of any notice or consideration.

The year 1859 began badly, so far as operatic affairs were concerned. Her Majesty's Theatre came to a dead-lock at the end of the season of 1858, and Mr. Lumley retired once more and for ever from the scene of his numerous efforts, not to maintain the *prestige* of that time-honoured home of the lyric drama, but to keep up a competition with the Royal Italian Opera, which his own folly, not to say perverseness, had been chiefly instrumental in creating. Mr. F. Gye's *troupe* was so thoroughly well furnished with competent *artistes*, that there was no need for him to take over any of the discarded members of the closed theatre. Those *artistes*, however, were not disposed to let a year go by without being heard, for not to be heard was to be forgotten. They therefore formed an association under Mr. E. T. Smith, a person of great enterprise and singular courage, but without the slightest experience, and opened Drury Lane Theatre, which was refused to Mr. F. Gye when he was in trouble, thus compelling him to do the best of which the Lyceum was capable. Thither went Mdlle. Piccolomini, whose popularity was as fast

waning as Mdlle. Titiens', who joined the venture, was increasing, all the other *prime donne* being laid aside. Signor Mongini, a *tenore robusto* of the coarsest and most untutored school, although possessed of a magnificent voice, was conjoined with Signor Giuglini, whilst M. Bélart accepted the position of third tenor, and made good his pretensions to something much higher. The season was but short, and several highly popular operas were brought forward with a certain amount of care, which spoke well for the earnestness of the direction, by whom it was asserted, at the close, that "no loss had been experienced." But one novelty was given —*Les Vêpres Siciliennes*—which I had heard four years previously at the Grand Opéra, Paris, with Mdlle. Cruvelli as the heroine, although it failed here, as elsewhere, to maintain the reputation which Verdi had won by his *Trovatore*, *Traviata*, and one or two other works of minor importance. In the absence of Mdlle. Cruvelli, who had retired from the stage, Mdlle. Titiens undertook the part of the heroine; but although she laboured conscientiously to make something of it, it completely beat her, and she has been wise enough never again to waste her powers upon crudities that "betray nothing else than leanness and want of resource by reason of their noise and eccentricity."

At the Royal Italian Opera two new *prime donne* were tried —one, Mdlle. Lotti, utterly to fail; the other, Mdme. Penco,*

* Penco (Rosina), a popular Italian operatic singer, was born at Naples in 1830, where her education was early directed to the mastery of musical art. She made her first public appearance as Lucia, in Donizetti's opera, at Copenhagen in 1847, and before a London audience at Covent Garden in 1859. Amongst many original parts composed expressly for her, that of Leonora, in Verdi's *Trovatore*, is perhaps the best known. In London Madame Penco's chief success was obtained by her impersonation of the parts of Violetta in the *Traviata*, and Zerlina in *Don Giovanni*. See *Men of the Times*, p. 643

to win little else than a *succès d'estime*. A Signor Debassini also attempted to supply the place which Graziani had temporarily vacated; but although possessed of an organ of great beauty, he failed to win a permanently favourable reception. Madame Penco had been so well received in Paris, and was, moreover, so conscientious an *artiste*, that it is impossible to pass her by without a few remarks upon her qualifications for the position she had creditably won. She possessed a pleasing and even soprano voice, which was fairly, though not unimpeachably, produced. Her execution was rather neat than brilliant; but the "delivery of her voice, whether in sentimental, forcible, or brilliant passages, was accomplished by means of such an unpleasant working of her features as seriously to impair all charm." As an actress she was sensible and intelligent rather than impassioned; but she lacked that true histrionic quality which, without effect or exertion, at once stamps an actress as "to the manner born." She was a useful but never a brilliant addition to the Royal Italian Opera *troupe*. Towards the close of the season Tamberlik once more put in an appearance, making his *rentrée* in *Otello*. Showing it to be but too apparent that his once-magnificent organ was no longer equal to the strain put upon it, he was received but coldly, and placed at a disadvantage he was never able to recover. During the season *Il Don Giovanni* drew, as it never fails to do, its traditional crowds, although Mario, who was induced to undertake the title *rôle*, made nothing of the part of the Spanish libertine—the music being transposed to suit his voice—except looking like one of the magnificent

Madame Penco in Italy, Spain, and France took the highest ground. For the season 1872—3, she has the Pasta-Grisi *répertoire* at "Les Italiens," Paris.

portraits of Velasquez just stepped out of the canvas on which it had been painted. "Nothing more picturesque than his appearance was ever seen on the stage; but, as regarded his assumption of the character, which the musical transpositions already mentioned involved, the effect did not justify the temerity." Madame Penco's Zerlina, although by no means up to the mark or equal to many other versions witnessed in previous years, was certainly one of her best efforts. It was not her fault that nature prevented the possibility of her ever looking the coquettish peasant girl; but she sang most of Mozart's music with a steadiness and "skill" that greatly redounded to her credit, and raised her very considerably in public estimation.

The great event of the season, however, was the presentation of Meyerbeer's last work, *Dinorah*, written expressly for the Opéra Comique, Paris, where it had been entitled *Le Pardon de Ploërmel*. It is not too high praise to accord when it is said that this opera was executed in the highest Royal Italian Opera style. The extremely long and difficult overture, the opening of which is marked with so much quaint originality, went so well, and so delicious was the effect of the unseen chant of the "pilgrimage" behind the curtain, that it was most vehemently encored. Nothing better could have been desired than the heroine of the evening, Mdme. Miolan-Carvalho, who had "created" the part in Paris, and who was engaged to represent it at Covent Garden by Meyerbeer's express desire. This lady was one of the most remarkable *artistes* of modern times. With the exception of Madame Persiani, a more brilliant vocalist, or one more "alive to the niceties of accent, was scarcely ever heard." She had that charm and

feeling, too, which study may work out, but which nature alone gives. With a voice of very small power, and a tendency to sing sharp, it was yet a treat to "hear how she contrived to satisfy as well as to penetrate the minds of her audience." For a few moments she was evidently excessively nervous, as if overwhelmed by the size of the stage and the proportions of a theatre to which she had hitherto been unaccustomed; but that feeling almost instantly passed away, so that in a few minutes "she got fast hold of her hearers by her brilliancy and pathos, the charm of skill and of heart making want of volume of voice forgotten, whilst she herself went on improving in composure and success till the last bar of her arduous task" was completed. Madame Miolan-Carvalho's powers as an actress proved to be greater than had been expected. There was a novelty in the intensity and truth of her treatment of the love-crazed heroine, which manifested impressiveness without grimace and impulsiveness without rant. Equally excellent was Gardoni's representation of the cowardly piper, Corentino, his version being "lively, easy, and perfectly self-forgetting." Not so Graziani, whose Hoel was a heavy and lumbering personation in point of action, and uncouth and rugged as to vocalisation. Of the chorus, band, and conductor every good thing might be said, so that the performance cannot but be recorded as one of most remarkable efficiency and success. It was several times repeated to the end of the season, "every night seeming to have made the performance riper, the music more popular, and the audiences more enthusiastic." Few successes, indeed, had ever been greater than was that of *Dinorah*.

During the recess which followed the season of 1855-6, some of the principal members of the Sacred Harmonic Society had

occupied themselves with considering how the approaching centenary of Handel's death could be best commemorated in the year 1859. The commemoration of Handel, one hundred years from his birth, in Westminster Abbey, in 1784, and the Abbey Festival of 1834,* were doubtless far less effective as choral displays than the oratorio concerts given in such frequency by the Sacred Harmonic Society. Nor was this to be wondered at. Westminster Abbey only allowed of a clear orchestral space between its great pillars of 33 feet. Exeter Hall had considerably more than double that width. However imposing the 1784 Abbey commemoration of Handel might have appeared to those who witnessed it,—Dr. Burney tells us it was feared the enormous mass of sound would blow the glass out of the windows of the venerable pile,—such a choral exhibition would excite no surprise in the present day. With the example set by the great musical opening of the Crystal Palace in 1854, it was felt that a commemoration of Handel in 1859, in any existing building in London, whether Exeter Hall, Westminster Abbey, St. Paul's, or even Westminster Hall, would fail to afford a complete exhibition of that "master's" colossal genius, and would prove unworthy of the choral advance of the age in which it was undertaken.

It had been foreseen from the first by the Society, that, with the acknowledged chief of conductors in Europe at their head, he alone was preëminently fitted for the office of conductor on such an occasion. Apart from his ability in the Society's and the Birmingham Festival orchestras, the extra accompaniments he had added for that Society to several of Handel's oratorios specially pointed to Mr. Costa as the

* See vol. i. p. 308.

musician of the time, upon whom the laborious duty of conducting an appropriate Handel Festival should devolve. With the conviction that no building of sufficient capacity or convenience existed in London for the commemoration, preliminary steps had been taken to gain a guarantee fund for the erection of a vast Handel Hall in the metropolis, either as a temporary structure or as a permanent building. Support to a considerable extent had already been secured for this object. The burning down of Covent Garden Opera House, however, transferred the operatic *artistes* to the Crystal Palace. The success of the concerts given by those *artistes* in that place led some members of the Society to inquire and examine for themselves whether it could not be adapted to the purpose of a series of magnificent Handel performances. Other circumstances, of which the committee were watchful, rendered it necessary to act with promptitude and determination. Communications being opened between the directors of the Palace and the committee of the Sacred Harmonic Society, they resulted in more mature negotiations, and ultimately it was mutually resolved, in the autumn of 1856, that a preliminary Handel Festival should be held in the centre transept of the Crystal Palace, under the direction of Mr. Costa, in the summer of 1857, with a view to determine whether the great commemoration of 1859 could be held with adequate effect in the same *locale*. With a happy division of labour, whilst the Crystal Palace Company took upon themselves all details connected with the audience, the Sacred Harmonic Society undertook the entire musical arrangements. How the Festival of 1857 succeeded; how it was followed up by the still greater commemoration of 1589; how the Handel Festival of 1862

eclipsed its predecessors from the advantages resulting from the erection of the great roof spanning the colossal orchestra; how in 1865 the acoustical properties of the centre transept were still further improved, so that the great mass of executants—nearly four thousand in number—as well as the solo singers, were then heard in all their magnificence, and in all their details, is matter of such recent history, and has occupied the pens of so many hundreds of able critics, that to go at length into the individual features of these Festivals here is not only unnecessary, but would swell this retrospect to a far greater length than it ought to occupy. Suffice it to say, that all concurrent testimony witnesses to the astounding excellence of these great choral celebrations. One and all, the critics of every country have testified to their unparalleled magnificence. Meyerbeer, present in 1859, described the performance of *Israel in Egypt* as the most wondrous display of choral power he had, with even his vast experience, ever witnessed.

Without, therefore, entering into details, it may be stated that these four great Handel Festivals—which were only carried through by the almost Herculean labours of their conductor, and by the earnest, devoted, and disinterested exertions of many attached members of the Sacred Harmonic Society—resulted in a receipt of upwards of one hundred thousand pounds, and that they were attended by upwards of a quarter of a million persons!

Her Majesty and the Prince Consort attended the Festival of 1857. His Royal Highness was also present at the performance of *Israel in Egypt* in 1859. Since that performance, the melancholy event which struck grief into the hearts of all interested in the well-being of musical art, as well as of those

interested in every other art or science in this country, unhappily deprived the Handel Festivals, as well as other great undertakings—many of which, perhaps, stand more in need of such aid—of the support arising from discriminating Royal patronage!

The Handel Festivals were of so much importance that they deserve to be treated of at considerable length. As, however, to do this is impossible, it must suffice that I relate the circumstances of the first of these musical congresses in a somewhat condensed form, from a report which I myself was called upon at the time to furnish for a journal with which I had then, and still have, the honour to be connected.

On Saturday, June 23rd, the actual work of this great Handel Festival—the most truly important musical congress that ever was held—may be said to have been fairly inaugurated at the Crystal Palace. Long before eleven o'clock, at which hour all the performers were directed to be in their several places, every corner of the gigantic orchestra was filled, from the floor to the topmost bench, with a body of musicians, vocalists, and instrumentalists, animated by one common feeling—to do ample justice to the important work they had before them, and to demonstrate to the world that Handel's majestic harmonies can never die, and that their interpretation would once more prove—if proof were needed—after all that has been said to the contrary, that England *is* a musical nation. The vast area of the building was also filled in every corner, whilst the various galleries were, for the most part, occupied with a large and eager audience, drawn together to enjoy a great musical prelude, preparatory to a feast, the richness of which but few were unable either to appreciate or enjoy.

Mr. Costa took his place with his accustomed punctuality, amidst a perfect *furore* of applause, both from the audience and orchestra, but waited for a few minutes, in order to see certain points of necessary organisation completed, ere he lifted his *bâton* to give the signal for the commencement of an action, which would give satisfaction and enjoyment to the multitude of hearers, who were gathered on every side around him. Ten minutes having elapsed, he gave the necessary indication for unanimous attention, when the whole company, both performers and audience, rose *en masse* for the "National Anthem," the first verse of which was given by Mdme. Novello with that bell-like ringing tone and thrilling expression which made her voice heard from end to end of the entire Palace. The second verse was sung as a semi-chorus; but the third was given out with the entire force of the congregated harmonists, telling that the improvement in the adaptation and arrangement of the orchestra, for better acoustic effects than were possible two years previously, were as perfect as could be obtained. When the "National Anthem" was concluded, the real business of the rehearsal commenced, with the "Hallelujah Chorus" of the *Messiah*, the force and intonation of which were indescribable. This was immediately followed by "Worthy is the Lamb" and the "Amen" choruses. The efficiency of the orchestra was here so tested as to render further preparation for any other part of that oratorio quite unnecessary. Mr. Costa, therefore, proceeded at once to the second day's selection, the greater part of which he rehearsed with the utmost care. The most remarkable feature in this part of the Repetition was the chorus from *Saul*, "Envy! eldest born of hell," in which the strictest attention to light and shade, as well as

accurate intonation, is indispensable to give effect to Handel's purpose. The singing of this chorus, which had all the disadvantage of having previously been scarcely known to one in a hundred of the executants, was a *chef-d'œuvre*, and testified with the utmost certainty to the admirable selection of competent voices, but much more so as to the concentrated power of the one man who, by the most simple direction, yet by the decision of his manner, and firmness of indication, could so impart confidence to the masses under his guidance, as to insure a perfect rendering of every difficulty which had to be compassed. The contrast between the manner with which this chorus and those of the *Messiah* had been rendered was so great, that it put an end at once to all doubt as to the efficiency both of the band and vocalists. "The Dead March" from *Saul* was then rehearsed, and so exquisitely played as to draw tears from many an eye. The next portion taken up was the Dettingen "Te Deum," which was followed by the selection from *Samson*, all of which was gone through. Not so, however, with the portions from *Judas Maccabæus*, "See, the conquering hero," being the only feature of that work to which attention was accorded. At this period Mr. Costa dismissed his willing and obedient subjects for an hour's relaxation, after which they were again assembled to attack the *Israel in Egypt*, which they did with right goodwill and earnestness, revelling, as it were, in its gigantic harmonies. The audience, forgetting they were at a rehearsal and not at a regular performance, burst all bounds after the "Hailstone Chorus," and positively encored it—a decision to which Mr. Costa yielded at once with excellent taste, and with his usual grace and good humour. From the beginning to the end there was scarcely a

hitch in the rehearsal of this great work; and when the last chorus, "Sing ye to the Lord," was finished, the applause of the audience showed that any doubt as to the triumphant success of the Festival, if ever it had existed, was entirely at an end. One general feeling of satisfaction, indeed, was expressed on all hands; and many a visitor, who had come with a steady determination to hear nothing more than what the rehearsal would furnish, forthwith took tickets for one or more of the performances. The cheers which had welcomed Mr. Costa when he took his place in the orchestra were now repeated with the utmost enthusiasm; the occupants of the several departments vieing with the general public in their demonstrations of respect to the only man, *par excellence*, who then, as now, could bring such a gigantic work as the control, direction, and obedience of upwards of 3000 performers to the most exact and definite conclusions, simply by the exercise of the will, as indicated by the beat of a *bâton* of the slightest proportions.

An hour, at least, before one o'clock had struck on Monday, June 25th, most of the audience were in their places, including no less than 17,109 persons, being nearly a third more than the number of those present at the first concert of 1857. The audience not being entirely seated by the hour fixed, a few minutes' law was allowed. When, however, the performance began it proceeded in good earnest.

It is clearly a work both needless and superfluous to attempt to offer any critical remarks whatever upon the *Messiah* itself. A work which has stood the test of a whole century, and with every additional generation has gone on increasing in public estimation, so as at last to be, as it were, a part and parcel of our musical constitution, needs no encomiums whatever. Its

universal popularity is the best test of its excellence; whilst to attempt to detract in the slightest degree from its merits would be an impertinence so insufferable, that the man who could venture upon such a morbid course of perverse criticism would scarcely deserve to be pitied for the amount of indignation he would raise against himself. Some, perhaps, might be found, by searching narrowly after them, who pretend that Handel had no genius. Their numbers, however, are happily so few, that general opinion would at once and for ever put them down, were they unwise enough to parade their absurd theories before the musical public of the present day. Whilst Handel's choruses are practised and sung by the million in every city and town—nay, in many, too, of the most distant country villages of Great Britain and Ireland—and tend to civilise human nature, the fact is not only patent, but positive, that the "tone poet," who was inspirited by Providence with the gift to conceive and work out such mighty combinations of sound, must have been possessed of talents and powers far above those conferred upon the generality of musicians. Handel's greatness will indeed endure so long as music holds its sway, and such homage as was at this congress paid to his genius and his memory could but increase that greatness, and extend his fame wider and wider still than it has yet spread and multiplied. Whilst, however, I would abstain from criticism with all humility, respect, and reverence for Handel's matchless specimens of harmonious grandeur and contrapuntal sublimity, there is no need that I should be restrained—especially at this distance of time—from comment on the manner in which those specimens were, for the most part, interpreted. I will, therefore, deal first of all with the principal singers—

Madame Novello, Miss Dolby, Mr. Sims Reeves, Mr. Weiss, and Signor Beletti. To the rendering of some portions of the solos of the *Messiah*, intrusted to Madame Novello, it was impossible to do otherwise than take exception. The text of Handel should never be changed or interpolated. The "tradition" has come down to us how he himself directed that text to be observed. Madame Novello departed from that "tradition" in several instances, two of which I was constrained more particularly to specify—in the recitatives announcing the birth of the Messiah, and in that plaintive manifestation of faith, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." Even if the alteration of the text were an improvement—which I deny—I should still question the taste which induces that alteration. Homage, I am quite sure, no one was more proud or willing to pay to the greatness of Handel's genius than was Madame Novello herself. I therefore charitably endeavoured to attribute these mistakes rather to a desire to do him greater justice than to parade her own acquirements. What I have said as to Madame Novello, also applied with equal force to Mr. Sims Reeves in one or two particulars. All the world knows that he once had an excellent A in his voice; but there was no need that he should, in order to show it off, entirely change Handel's own "final close" of the song, "Thou shalt dash them." I have often remarked, during that gentleman's highly popular career, that, competent and clever as he has usually been, he entirely misunderstood the method in which this song should be sung. Defective, however, as his style has herein been, it has been rendered doubly disagreeable by the persistency in his adoption of a conclusion never intended by Handel, and which, though it always gained a round of

applause from the general public, was yet laughed at even by many of those as they applauded; whilst it was most certainly deprecated by all by whose judgment every *artiste* is bound to abide. As to Miss Dolby, her singing of the text not only of Handel, but of every other composer, was always irreproachable. She played no tricks with that text, but delivered it as written; and thus did justice both to the genius that produced the harmony, no less than to herself. Mr. Weiss and Signor Beletti equally deserved praise in this respect. Their adherence to the score of the several parts with which they were intrusted was the theme of general praise. Would that as much could have been said for Madame Novello and Mr. Sims Reeves!

Having dismissed the principals, the band and chorus next come under consideration; and here there was not a syllable to utter in depreciation of a single point in the interpretation of the entire oratorio. The "For unto us," the "Hallelujah," the "Worthy is the Lamb," and the "Amen" choruses, in all human probability, will rarely be again heard by the present generation as rendered with the same amount of precision and perfection that prevailed on this occasion. The stupendous effects, which these portions of the work brought out, are not to be described. They must have been heard to have been appreciated. I might enumerate many other points in various portions of the performance where excellence was attained and the highest pitch of success achieved. But I pause. Did I record all I felt, my expressions might seem to be too superlative, and therefore I forbear. This, however, I must remark, that, taken in every particular and as a whole, no performance of the *Messiah* I had ever listened to was so faultless as that

of Monday, June 25, 1859. To whom could this be ascribed but to the master-mind—second only to that of Handel himself—who directed the work and brought it to such an issue—Mr. Costa?

My notice of the rehearsal of the appropriate selection from Handel's works, consisting of the Dettingen "Te Deum" and portions of *Belshazzar*, *Saul*, and *Judas Maccabæus*, renders it scarcely necessary that I should intimate anything more than the entire success of Wednesday's (June 27th) performance, at which no less than 17,644 persons were assembled, to enjoy as rich a treat of musical excellence as could ever be prepared. It was remarked with some degree of satisfaction, that both Madame Novello and Mr. Sims Reeves on this occasion, for once, adhered strictly to the text of Handel, and thus obtained in a great measure a reversal of the adverse judgment they had elicited at the previous concert. The grandeur of the "Te Deum"—of late years much too little remembered—told with enormous effect, as well it might, when every effort was made by all concerned in its interpretation to do justice to its merits. The parts of this work which deserved particular mention were certainly the choruses, "To Thee cherubim"—magnificently led off and sustained by the *sopranos*—"When Thou hadst overcome," "Day by day," and "O Lord, in Thee." The decision of the attack, the nicety of the alternation of light and shade, and the general *à plomb* manner of delivery of the various phrases and modulations of which "numbers," absolutely left nothing to be desired. When it is remembered that the first performance of this massive Hymn of Praise took place in the Chapel Royal, St. James's, then much smaller than it now is, it can scarcely be imagined that even Handel himself

could have formed a notion of the means for increased development which he had himself provided. It is, however, one of the singular capabilities of nearly all his harmonies, that the more the several vocal parts are augmented, so much the more is the indication imparted that they would bear addition upon addition only to enhance the grandeur of construction and the sublimity of conception. Never was this fact elicited with greater precision than in the instance of the rendering of the Dettingen "Te Deum," which presented, as was to have been expected, a prominent feature of this Centenary Commemoration.

If one proof could more explicitly indicate than any other the progress of musical knowledge in this country, it was the circumstance of the chorus from *Saul*, "Envy! eldest born of hell"—of which I have spoken as having formed a peculiar feature of the previous Saturday's rehearsal—eliciting a unanimous encore. Well did the nice, delicate, and effective interpretation of this extraordinary specimen of part-writing—abounding as it does in intricate modulation—deserve such a compliment. It was, indeed, the gem of the morning's performance, and put many other specimens completely in the shade, but not till "The Dead March" had been given with similar results to those which the rehearsal had drawn forth. This, too, was re-demanded, and played even more sublimely the second time than the first. The rendering of the *Samson* selection called for no particular remark, save that "Let the bright seraphim"—having been most brilliantly sung by Mdme. Novello—was repeated by general acclamation. In the *Judas Maccabæus* selection a similar compliment was paid to Mr. Sims Reeves for his version of "Sound an alarm"—which,

by-the-bye, he would pronounce "Sound an alarum!" That song at the best is but a clap-trap effusion, and scarcely worthy of Handel's reputation. Not so, however, the succeeding song, "From mighty kings," which Mdme. Novello sang as it had never been given since the days of Mrs. Salmon; and the chorus, "We never will bow down." I take it that this chorus was one of the most important features of the entire morning's performance. The grandeur of the expressive harmonies on the words, "We worship God, and God alone," as rendered by vocal and instrumental combination, was positively overwhelming. Those harmonies towered one above another, like mountains increasing in height and magnificence, only to culminate with an excellence as superb as it was thrilling. "See the conquering hero comes" wound up the morning's performance most successfully, and barely escaped a demand for repetition. Effective, however, as was that jubilant song of triumph, the previous chorus had completely overweighed it. After that specimen of choral effect and instrumental accompaniment, anything else could but have been weak and tame; and popular as this "song of triumph" is, it had not sufficient intrinsic merit to bear comparison with its gigantic predecessor.

The entire performance of this day was another decisive triumph for musical progress. Anything like dissatisfaction was out of the question. Hypercritical, indeed, must those have been who could have found the slightest cause for complaint. Certainly it could not have been met with, so far as orchestral control was concerned; for here the obedience of the whole body of executants was as decisive as it had been on the previous Monday, showing that the better Mr. Costa was known by his troops, the more precise and efficient was their

elucidation of the several details, whether it were in *nuance* or *tours de force*, which the works under interpretation demanded. The wear and tear upon this competent *chef d'orchestre* must have been on this day enormous. Nevertheless he brought his work to a close with as much *éclat* as its commencement had aroused, and so won another chaplet, making the words of the concluding chorus especially applicable to himself:

> "See, the conquering hero comes,—
> Sound the trumpets, beat the drums;
> Sports prepare, the laurel bring,
> Songs of triumph to him sing."

The success of the Monday and Wednesday performances, combined with an announcement in several of Friday's (June 29th) morning papers, that the Queen and the court, together with the King of the Belgians and his suite, would be present, drew together an audience consisting of no less than 26,827 persons. Unfortunately, this announcement did not prove entirely true. *Her Majesty did not make her appearance.* The Prince Consort, accompanied by the Princesses Alice and Helena, alone occupied the Royal box, a very small suite only being in attendance upon them. Very many reasons were assigned for this much-regretted absence of the Queen, one of which—pretty freely canvassed—was that Handel was not so great a favourite with Her Majesty as he had been both with George II. and her grandfather, George III., and that her preference was given to lighter music than to that of the more severe school of which the "giant of harmony" was a recognised master. The more general impression, however—it is but fair to say—was, that the receipt of a telegram, early in the morning, at Buckingham Palace, announcing the

death of the Duchess of Saxe-Weimar, mother of the Princess of Prussia, and grandmother of Prince Frederick of Prussia, the husband of the Princess Royal, had hindered the purpose of Her Majesty to grace a Festival which was attended on this day by no less a number than nearly 27,000 of Her Majesty's most distinguished, respectable, and loyal subjects. The Royal party were, as usual, punctual to the hour for the commencement of the concert, and upon their entering the box—which had been elegantly fitted up in the first gallery of the transept, opposite to the orchestra—the whole audience rose and gave a hearty cheer, which had scarcely died away and been acknowledged, ere the band struck up the "National Anthem," the three verses of which were thus sung:—the first by Mdme. Novello; the second by Mdme. Lemmens Sherrington, Miss Dolby, Mr. Sims Reeves, and Mr. Weiss; and the last by the entire chorus accompanied by the band. When the audience and the performers had re-seated themselves, at the conclusion of this loyal demonstration, the oratorio selected for the day, *Israel in Egypt*, was commenced by Mr. Sims Reeves' enunciation of the recitative, "Now there arose a new king," which was immediately followed by the chorus, led off by Miss Dolby, "And the children of Israel sighed," the contrapuntal effects of which belong to Handel's most severe manner, and require the most accurate rendering to produce general acceptance. Nothing was wanting on the part of those engaged in the interpretation of this hard-and-dry specimen of the more antiquated school of harmony. One and all, both instrumentalists and vocalists, bent to their work with deliberate earnestness, and with a manifest determination to show, as was proved in 1857, that the *Israel* is the most effective work which Handel ever

constructed, so far as choral writing is concerned. In the first part of this oratorio there are but two recitatives and one song: therefore, the entire weight of the work rests with the body of performers, and well did they fulfil their allotted task. The "Hailstone Chorus" received its accustomed encore, and went the second time with greater precision than at first, the tenors at the outset appearing to show too much eagerness to give prominent effect to their part of the score—a fault which any other conductor than Mr. Costa would have had the greatest difficulty in remedying. After a bar or two, however, the obedience of these voices became all that it should have been; and on their being called upon a second time to give proof of their efficiency, they rectified their previous unsteadiness to a man by the most positive improvement. The greatest chorus of the entire oratorio, to my mind, "He sent a thick darkness," was most unexceptionably sung. As part after part of this descriptive combination was taken up, it seemed as if the relative proportions were given out by a mighty machine, rather than by human voices. The steadiness of all the executants was, indeed, truly remarkable, inasmuch as without precision all the intended effects would have been hopelessly ruined. Chorus after chorus rolled on, after this manifestation of perfect rendering, in massive grandeur, to the close of the first part—each one lifting the audience to the highest pinnacle of wonder and admiration. Of the second part, it is enough to say that the same precision which had been apparent in the other mornings' performances, was quite as steadily and uniformly preserved. The most difficult choruses certainly went the best, and, as in 1857, the catching and intricate "The people shall hear," was even more steady than any other

portion of the oratorio, Mr. Costa having once more achieved what no other conductor in my recollection ever accomplished —that this singular but most descriptive specimen should go as accurately as if there were not a single complex point in its construction, instead of its being full of complexities. The few portions of the second part for principals were entrusted to Mdme. Novello, Mdme. Lemmens Sherrington, Miss Dolby, Mr. Weiss, and Signor Beletti, and were most carefully and creditably executed. Mr. Sims Reeves gained his usual encore in the difficult song, "The enemy said," although the questionable taste, which induced him to end this song upon the upper A of his register, was exhibited with all its accustomed vehemence. Mdme. Novello on this occasion adhered more strictly than usual to the text of the author; and Miss Dolby delivered the songs allotted to her, especially "Thou shalt bring them in," with her usual unequivocal taste and judgment. Her reading of the latter song was the brightest gem of the morning, so far as the principals were concerned, and was worth travelling several hundred miles to hear. The somewhat noisy but, nevertheless, highly popular duet, "The Lord is a man of war"—most satisfactorily rendered by Signor Beletti and Mr. Weiss—was redemanded with the utmost enthusiasm; whilst the gigantic chorus, "The horse and his rider," most clearly and brilliantly enunciated by Madame Novello in the unaccompanied solos, which lead up to one of the most cleverly worked fugues that ever was written, brought the Festival to a successful and glorious conclusion. The "National Anthem" was then again sung, this time with verse and chorus, in each instance Mdme. Novello taking the first and last, and Mdme. Lemmens Sherrington, Miss Dolby,

Mr. Sims Reeves, and Mr. Weiss singing the second. Then burst out a shout of applause that made the whole building ring from end to end; first, in compliment to the Royal party on their leaving their seats, and next to Mr. Costa, who indeed well deserved this manifestation of appreciation, as well as such a reward for his arduous services. Doubtless, all praise was due to the chairman and committee of the Crystal Palace, no less than to the gentlemen who held the same office in the Sacred Harmonic Society, and to none more than to the late Mr. R. Bowley, the indefatigable manager of the former Company, and ardent supporter of musical progress in this country. Their arrangements were admirable, and the manner in which they fulfilled a task, for the most part irksome, and often attended with considerable perplexities, left nothing to be desired. The perfection and triumph, however, of the entire Festival, in its musical results, were attributable to Mr. Costa, without whose energy and decision, perseverance and patience, ability and combination, every appliance, perfect as it might have been, would have been ineffective. From first to last, Mr. Costa added another brilliant proof to the assertion of one most competent to offer an opinion—no other than M. Meyerbeer, who was himself present at this morning's performance—that he is "the greatest *chef d'orchestre* of the world."

Up to the present point I have only spoken of the musical success of this most important musical congress. It now affords me unmitigated pleasure to announce that, as a pecuniary speculation, it was most prosperous, the committee having realised a profit commensurate with the liberality of their expenditure, thus proving the perfect success of an undertaking

which, in every respect, was the greatest of its kind that the world had ever witnessed, and which may indeed be equalled, but never can be surpassed.

If I were to write my "Recollections" of the succeeding "Handel Festivals" of 1862 and 1865, I could scarcely do more than repeat the above remarks, so admirable were the performances on each occasion under Mr. Costa's direction. I may, however, be pardoned, perhaps, for mentioning that at the former I was the means of inducing the committee to revive a chorus which was equally unknown both to themselves and Mr. Costa—"The dead shall live," the words* of which are by Dryden, and form the subject for a "grand chorus" at the conclusion of "A Song for St. Cecilia's Day, 1687." This truly "grand chorus," the force of which is as perfect as the music of Handel is sublime, is preceded by an unaccompanied recitative, save towards the close, when the trumpet *obbligato* is, with most thrilling effect, introduced. The recitative was declaimed with immense fire and passion by Mdlle. Titiens, but did not reach my idea of the sublimity imparted to it by Mrs. Salmon, who had sung it in —— Cathedral when I first made that lady's acquaintance,† since which time—an interval

* The following are Dryden's words in their entirety :

"As from the power of sacred lays
The spheres began to move,
And sung the great Creator's praise
To all the blessed above ;
So when the last and dreadful hour
This crumbling pageant shall devour,
The trumpet shall be heard on high,
The dead shall live, the living die,
And music shall untune the sky."

† See vol. i. p. 37.

of forty years—I had never forgotten the impression that matchless English vocalist had made upon my youthful mind. On that occasion the *obbligato* passages were played by Mr. Charles Harper, the prince of trumpeters; his son, with equal brilliancy of tone and matchless execution, accompanied Mdlle. Titiens.

CHAPTER IX.

1860—66.

To do more than record one operatic event in the year 1860 is unnecessary—the introduction of Gluck's *Orfeo*, as it had been arranged and digested for the Théâtre Lyrique, Paris, where Mdme. Viardot had recently made an immense sensation by her performance of the title *rôle*. As the services of the only competent person to be met with were not secured, Mdlle. Czillag was intrusted with the part, who, however kindly she might have been accredited with good intentions, was totally unequal to its demands; but it was much to her commendation that, having taken Mdme. Viardot for her model, she did her utmost, and that seemed to satisfy the public, who however soon wearied of a work beyond their powers of appreciation. This lady also undertook the part of Fides in the *Prophète*, to Tamberlik's Jean of Leyden, but made little or nothing of it, her voice being unequal and her execution incomplete. Notwithstanding such mediocrity, a truly grand *artiste*, M. Faure,* arrived in time to produce an

* Faure (Jean Baptiste) was born at Moulins, January 15th, 1830, and at a very early age exhibited most exceptional musical talent. Having left the Madeleine, Paris, where he had sung as a boy chorister, he entered the Conservatoire in 1843, and studied persistently there for nine years. He made his first appearance at the Opéra Comique in 1852, and was immediately accepted

interest such as had never been obtained since the departure of Tamburini, and débuted as Ferdinand in *La Gazza Ladra*, to Mdme. Penco's Ninetta. The worth of this genuine musician and admirable actor has been thoroughly tested, and he still remains the best of all the male importations from the Continent in modern times.

Her Majesty's Theatre was once more opened, under the management of Mr. E. T. Smith, with a tolerable company, the season commencing with a somewhat imperfect rendering of Weber's *Oberon*, in which Signor Mongini—as rough and uncouth as ever, in spite of his magnificent voice—attempted the part of Sir Huon. Madame Marie Cabel—a Parisian *artiste* of considerable fame, with a thoroughly French voice, of thin and wiry quality and considerable florid execution—was also engaged, and appeared in *La Figlia del Reggimento;* but she failed to secure anything approaching the admiration she had universally won in her own country. Madame Borghi-Mamo was also amongst the more prominent engagements; but "her voice being impaired, mostly tremulous, often out of tune, and her execution defective," she, too, made no impression that is to be recorded as even slightly favourable.

In the autumn of this year "the Pyne and Harrison Company"—so called because it was conducted by Miss Louisa Pyne and Mr. W. Harrison, two highly capable and deservedly popular British *artistes*—commenced a season for the production of English opera, and brought out several works of

as the legitimate successor of M. Bataille, and especially so in the *rôle* of Peter in M. Meyerbeer's *L'Etoile du Nord*. In 1859 the same composer wrote the part of Hoel for him in his *Pardon de Ploërmel* (*Dinorah*). See Vapereau, *Dictionnaire Universel des Contemporains*, p. 655.

merit during the winter months at the Royal Italian Opera House, the musical results of which—so far as I understood, since I did not witness them—were by no means satisfactory. It was, however, highly creditable to that Company that for several years they made the largest efforts to produce English opera on such a scale and in such a manner as to do the best that could be done to secure for it a permanent hope and prosperous financial returns. Had there been sufficient native talent existing, exclusive of the two managers, to have claimed the consideration of the public, the attempt might have been successful. Their efforts were largely aided by Mr. A. Mellon, who, as their musical conductor, promised to become the future successor of Mr. Costa, whenever that gentleman might be disposed to retire from the arduous and more active duties of his profession. All such promise, however, was dissolved by that gentleman's too early death in June 1867.

Early in the operatic season of 1861, a Signor Tiberini was engaged at the Royal Italian Opera, in the hope of his being able to replace Mario, whose powers were already beginning but too rapidly to wane, although he was still singing, as he has done to the last, with so admirable a method, that it was scarcely possible to become dissatisfied with him. The newcomer, however, showed that his voice was far from being of the requisite excellence, although it had been carefully trained. An appearance at that Opera-house was, however, much too severe an ordeal for him; and as he was no actor, he speedily departed. He was introduced by means of one of Mario's greatest efforts, Ferdinand in the *Favorita*, which was not at all fair to him, inasmuch as if he had been a Giuglini—which he was not—comparisons could but have been drawn to his

manifest disadvantage. Mdlle. Czillag made but little of the part of Leonora, but M. Faure's version of Alphonso XI. surpassed that of M. Baroilhet, for whom it was written.*

On Tuesday, May 14th, "a trump card" was indeed played by Mr. F. Gye having been fortunate enough to secure to himself the services of Mdlle. Adelina Patti, who "took the town by storm;" and no marvel, since no such *début* had been witnessed since that of Grisi on Easter Tuesday, 1834.† As I had been fortunate enough to witness the former event, so was I also privileged to be present at the latter, and in each instance the cases seemed to be very nearly identical. I had expected nothing from Grisi, and less, perhaps—certainly not more—from Mdlle. Adelina Patti. That she came out with equal powers to those manifested by her great predecessor is not to be admitted. She had not the advantages of the same training, nor was her voice thoroughly formed; but the singular combination of youth and maturity in her appearance could not fail to strike every beholder; and this, being added to musical qualities already singularly high, won for her, on the instant, a rapturous welcome. Her voice—a high soprano, well in tune—reached E flat in *alt* easily, and was powerful enough for any theatre. It was then more flexible than fascinating. The latter quality was to come, as it has done most abundantly. Her shake was clear and brilliant; but she seemed to prefer *staccato* flights and ornaments, which were more extraordinary than agreeable or satisfactory to a well-trained ear. As an actress, Mdlle. A. Patti was composed rather than sympathetic, although, as to the part in which she appeared—Amina in *La Sonnambula*—she had abundant

* See vol. i. p. 151.

* See vol. i. p. 287.

opportunities of showing the latter quality. What she did, however, was elegant and unaffected, yet not always appropriate; for instance, throughout her first sleep-walking scene she soliloquised in full voice till the moment when the weary girl lies down to repose, which was the best part of her performance. It was doubted at the time, by many of those best competent to judge, "whether another first-class *artiste*, or one who might become so, had appeared;" but time has proved that she was deserving of recognition in the former capacity, and that she has maintained and improved upon that position to the present hour. On the morning after this most satisfactory event, I met with Mr. F. Gye accidentally, and after expressing my admiration of Mdlle. A. Patti's talent, strongly advised him to secure her services to himself *en permanence*—a step he was wise enough to take, but about which it is scarcely possible that he could have ever for an instant hesitated.

As the career of Mdlle. A. Patti has been so successful, some few circumstances connected therewith may appropriately be introduced into this portion of my "Recollections," now rapidly drawing to a close.

Mdlle. Adelina Maria Clorinda Patti, the daughter of Salvatori Patti, is of Italian extraction, and was born at Madrid, April 9th, 1843. After a course of professional training under her brother-in-law, Maurice Strakosch, she appeared at New York, Nov. 24th, 1859, and reports of her fame reached London—where a much more brilliant success awaited her—some time previously to her arrival. She made her first appearance there, as I have already said, at the Royal Italian Opera, as Amina in *La Sonnambula*, May 14, 1861; and so

favourable was the impression created, that she became at once the leading favourite of the day. To Amina succeeded an equally successful performance of Lucia, in Donizetti's opera; but she gave still greater reason for approbation by her representation of the part of Violetta, in the *Traviata*, to which she imparted a purity with which it had rarely before been invested. Her Zerlina was also much admired, whilst in *Martha*, *Il Barbiere*, *La Gazza Ladra*, *Don Pasquale*, and *L'Elisir d'Amore*, she fully sustained the high reputation she had at once obtained. In 1864 she undertook the part of Margherita, in Gounod's *Faust*, and made an immense hit therein, as also afterwards in that composer's much less popular *Romeo et Giulietta*, which was the great attraction of the season of 1867. In the month of May, 1866, Mdlle. A. Patti married M. Louis Sebastian Henri de Roger de Cahusac, Marquis de Caux, who then held the appointment of equerry to the Emperor Napoleon III., from which he immediately retired, inasmuch as it was not the lady's intention, or his own desire, that she should give up the duties and the emoluments of her profession.* She therefore still remains the main prop and stay of the Royal Italian Opera, and is said to have concluded a fresh engagement for two years with Mr. F. Gye, at a salary of 200*l.* a night, combined with a free benefit and the choice of her own *répertoire*.

On Wednesday, July 24th, 1861, Grisi took another farewell, but it was not anticipated that this would be any more final than had been the last. On the following Wednesday she also sang at the Crystal Palace, as it was also said, for the

* See *Men of the Time*, pp. 639-40; and Vapereau, *Dictionnaire Universel des Contemporains*, p. 1408, ed. 1870.

last time, when I witnessed a circumstance which clearly enough manifested what comes of the evanescence of popularity, and the truth of the adage, "No longer pipe, no longer dance!" On retiring from the orchestra, after a peculiarly cold reception—as unkind as it was inconsiderate, seeing what the career of this remarkable woman had been—there was not a single person at the foot of the orchestra to receive or to accompany her to her retiring-room! I could imagine what her feelings at that moment must have been—she who had in former years been accustomed to be thronged, wherever she appeared, and to be the recipient of adulation—often as exaggerated as it was fulsome—but who was now literally deserted. With Grisi—although I had been once or twice introduced to her—I never had any personal acquaintance. I could not, however, resist the impulse of preceding her, without obtruding myself upon her notice, and opening the door of the retiring-room for her, which was situated at some considerable distance from the orchestra. Her look as I did this, and she passed out of sight, is amongst the most painful of my "Recollections;" for it uttered, more plainly than words could speak, how sweet had that small drop of consolation been to her at such a moment. It was the last time I ever saw the Diva.* How great and bitter was the change that nearly forty years had made for her!

Tuesday, April 15th, 1862, must by no means be left unnoticed, because of its having introduced to the Italian stage the most genuine (baritone) singer that England has produced

* Mme. Grisi was married to Le Marquis de Melcy, from whom she was divorced, and afterwards became the wife of Signor Mario. She died in Berlin last year.

since the days of Bartleman,* Mr. Santley. The opera was the *Trovatore,* he assuming the part of Il Conte di Luna; Tamberlik that of the hero; and Mdlle. Gordosa—also English—that of Leonora, and Mdme. Nantier-Didiée, that of Azucena. Of the ladies, the one had passed her meridian, and the other possessed a voice that had never been of rare quality, thoroughly wearied and worn. What Mr. Santley is precludes the necessity of my describing his *début* at length. No Englishman, since Braham, has so thoroughly maintained a hold upon the Italian operatic stage as he has done; and although the Milanese did not treat him fairly, and failed to give him the encouragement his talent warranted, when he sang a few years ago at La Scala, they would find it impossible to produce, among their own countrymen, a greater *artiste* than he has proved to be in his department. He has sung in the entire range of opera, and has made but one failure, that of Don Giovanni; but although he has not sufficient histrionic power to act that character according to its demands, he yet sung it as it has rarely been rendered since the days of Ambrogetti.† Signor Delle-Sedie was another baritone who appeared during this year in Verdi's *Ballo in Maschera;* but notwithstanding he had been a genuine *artiste* in his time, he came too late to be appreciated on this side of the Channel. Although his voice was gone, his phrasing was perfect. Mdlle. Antoinetta Fricci also this year put in a claim for consideration, by appearing as Valentine in *Les Huguenots,* and obtained a *succès d'estime,* which secured to her a permanent engagement for several years, the use that she was to the theatre being most unequivocal. This lady had thorough dramatic genius, and if

* See vol. i. p. 26. † Ibid. p. 31.

she had only possessed a voice of better quality, she would, in all probability, have been an accepted substitute for Grisi; but it was thin, metallic, and unsympathetic, and when strained, as it too often was, was anything but perfect in intonation. After a few years, Mdlle. Fricci became the wife of Signor Neri-Beraldi, and about three years since seceded from the Royal Italian Opera for an engagement at Moscow, where both her husband and herself were great favourites.

Whilst the season of 1862 was passing away, came "the most robust of all robust tenors" that had ever been heard in the memory of man, Herr Wachtel, about whom the Germans still make an immense fuss, and whom Mr. F. Gye seemed to have been induced to engage solely on the strength of his lungs—for certainly he had literally nothing else to recommend him. Had he been properly taught, he might have been ground down into a decent tenor, but he had never enjoyed that advantage; yet if he had been so, it is scarcely likely he would have much benefited, since he did not seem to have either mind or taste to be regulated by anything like method or rhythm. "He split the ears of the groundlings," and obtained the applause of the gallery by his roaring, but he never for an instant touched the true *connoisseur*, nor won his esteem or confidence. Happily, his presence at Covent Garden was of short duration; but even that was longer than was desirable. Mr. F. Gye was likewise induced to engage Mdlle. Battu, a French lady, who—although she had youth on her side—was of no advantage. In spite, however, of her unmitigated failure, she has since made for herself a reputation abroad that could hardly have been anticipated.

Once more Her Majesty's Theatre opened, the new *entrepreneur* being Mr. Mapleson, who gathered a tolerably strong company around him, chiefly consisting of those *artistes* who had been with Mr. Lumley when his management collapsed, and who had then taken part in Mr. E. T. Smith's bold but inexperienced venture. Mdlle. Titiens and Signor Giuglini were the leading *artistes;* and a series of performances, under the direction of Signor Arditi—then a rising, but afterwards a generally accepted, conductor—was instituted, that deserved, as they met with, much encouragement. Competition between the rival establishments was thus revived, for the benefit of art, and, with the exception of one year, has been maintained; Mr. Mapleson, up to the present time, having been by far more fortunate than Mr. F. Gye, inasmuch as he now has the invaluable services of Sir M. Costa, and a company the vigour of whose powers is by no means diminished.

Once more must I advert to the Philharmonic Society because of its Jubilee Concert, Monday, July 14th, when Mdme. Lind-Goldschmidt stepped out from her retirement to do a graceful act. About the concert itself nothing, however, of sufficient moment occurred to render it necessary to do more than record its having taken place.

For the opening of the Great National Exhibition of this year three original compositions by Meyerbeer, as representing Germany,—Auber, France,—and Mr. W. Sterndale Bennett, England, were sent in at the request of the Commissioners. Signor Verdi was also asked to contribute; but he wrote so fanciful and ungenial a work that it had to be declined. Of the performance of the compositions that were given it is not my intention to say a word, inasmuch as a

quarrel originated at the outset as to the performance of that of the English writer, which, it is to be hoped, is now, and may be for ever, buried in oblivion. The only reference to this Exhibition that I shall make is to record that Mr. Costa took me down to Meyerbeer's hotel, to call for him *en route* to Exeter Hall, for the rehearsal of his overture. As usual, the great *maestro* was nervous about its "going," and seriously told Mr. Costa he must have *ten* rehearsals. The answer he received was, "You shall have *two*." "But it will not go!" Meyerbeer replied. "We shall see," was the response. Truly enough, that overture had but *two* rehearsals, according to promise; but it was far better played "at first sight" than the second time. I sat beside Meyerbeer during the whole repetition; and at its close he once more repeated to me what he had twice previously said, "M. Costa is the greatest *chef-d'orchestre* of the world;" but on this occasion he added, "There is no other band in the whole of Europe that could have played my music at first sight, and without a mistake!" —a noble specimen of commendation, as true as its utterance was complimentary.

The operatic season of 1863 began with a new comer, Mdlle. Fioretti, who, but for her personal appearance, which was much against her, would have become one of the most prominent *prime donne* of her time, for she had not only an entire absence of affectation in manner, but she was a thoroughly "well-built" musician. If she had sung like an angel, however, she would not have been accepted, since she had no other charm than her voice to recommend her for consideration. Mdlle. A. Patti, who more and more improved upon acquaintance, continued to be the great attraction of the season, and

carried all before her. Not so her sister, Mdlle. Carlotta Patti, who—although a clever and enthusiastic *artiste*, with a voice of higher register than had, perhaps, been heard since that of the lady for whom Mozart wrote the extremely high music of the Queen of the Night, in his *Zauberflöte*—never won the esteem of those whose opinion was worth anything. She sang this season at Covent Garden, but her light paled before the more brilliant talents of her younger sister.

There was one event of this year, however, that cannot be passed over without special reference,—the first appearance of Mdlle. Lucca, on Saturday, July 18, in Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine*, that lady having been especially engaged at his request to fulfil the arduous duties of the unpleasant part of the heroine. In stature this gifted little lady was no taller than Mdlle. Piccolomini; but she possessed much greater dramatic talent, whilst her voice was infinitely better, her compass reaching C in *alt* easily, its tone being sufficiently powerful and correct in tune.

The history and career of Mdlle. Pauline Lucca is somewhat singular. She was born at Vienna in 1840, and is the daughter of humble but worthy parents, who, "on account of reduced circumstances, were unable to educate either herself or their other children. A professional singer, named Erl, who accidentally discovered that she possessed a most promising voice, very generously undertook to give her instruction. When only fifteen years of age, she obtained an engagement at the Karinther-Tor Theatre at Vienna, and assisted in the Sunday services at the Karl Kirche. At the latter place, the unavoidable absence of a leading vocalist, in 1856, gave the youthful aspirant an opportunity of distinguishing herself, and the

sensation she created was so great, that means were devised by the principal musicians in Vienna to enable her to complete her training. Her improvement was rapid and decided, and having accepted an engagement to sing Italian parts at the Olmütz Theatre, she appeared in September 1859, for the first time, as Elvira in Verdi's *Ernani*, with such success that brilliant offers were immediately made her from many parts of Germany. She preferred, however, to renew her engagement at Olmütz, during which she met with an adventure that tended very considerably to increase her popularity. Having been insulted by a female *artiste* of the same theatre, she at once informed the manager that unless she received an ample apology, nothing should induce her to appear again at Olmütz. That gentleman having threatened her with imprisonment, upon the terms of his contract, if she persisted in her resolution, she deliberately walked to the citadel, gave herself up, and remained in durance for four-and-twenty hours. The commotion this conduct occasioned induced the manager to use his influence with the offending lady to submit to Mdlle. Lucca's demand. On leaving her prison she at once terminated her engagement at Olmütz, and proceeded to Prague, where, in March 1860, she appeared as Valentine in the *Huguenots*, and in *Norma*, and at once secured the patronage of the Princess Colloredo, sister of the governor, the Count Clam-Gallas, &c. Shortly before her appearance at Prague, Meyerbeer, who, as the director of the Berlin Hof-opera Theatre, was at that time seeking for a *prima donna* competent to fill the part of the heroine in his last work, *L'Africaine*, had his attention directed to this rising star. The youth and genius of the young *artiste*, being just what Meyerbeer had

long looked for in vain, induced him to secure her services for three years at Berlin, where he gave her the advantage of his advice and tuition. In that capital Mdlle. Lucca met with her usual success, which so rapidly increased, that an engagement was offered her at the Imperial Academy of Music at Paris. This she refused, notwithstanding the urgent entreaty of her gifted friend and teacher that she should accept it. At his instigation, however, she entered into an arrangement with Mr. F. Gye to appear at the Royal Italian Opera in 1863, and carried all before her. Becoming dissatisfied with the terms of her engagement, she suddenly left London, assigning as a reason for her singular conduct, that "the Thames did not agree with her." On the production of Meyerbeer's *L'Africaine* at Covent Garden in 1865, she was induced to return, and has since shared the honours of that establishment with Mdme. Patti. In November 1865, she became the wife of Baron von Rahden—who was severely wounded at the opening of the recent Franco-German war—and was the *prima donna assoluta* of the Berlin Hof-opera Theatre, dividing her time between that capital and London, until she threw up her engagement at the Prussian capital for a tour in America."*

The *Faust* of Gounod had been rejected again and again by Mr. F. Gye for the Royal Italian Opera. With many others, I thought that *entrepreneur* was right in his decision; for I first heard that opera at Brussels, and could make nothing of it; then at Berlin, where I liked it less; and lastly at the Lyrique, Paris,—where it was originally produced,—only to condemn it *in toto*. I am free to confess, that in the whole experience of my life I never made a greater mistake. Mr.

* See *Men of the Time*, pp. 844-5.

Mapleson had the tact to perceive that the verdict of the *cognoscenti*—as they are called—on this side of the Channel was a mistake, and he boldly ventured to produce M. Gounod's *chef-d'œuvre*, as it turned out to be, as *the* event of Her Majesty's Theatre season for 1863. For the first time on hearing it with Mdlle. Titiens as Margherita, Mdme. Trebelli-Bettini as Siebel, Giuglini as Faust, Gassier as Mephistopheles, and Santley as Valentine, I began to like it; for then justice was undoubtedly done to every point, and the many beauties it possesses were brought out as I had never previously been able to perceive them. To this hour I maintain the opinion that from beginning to end the *Faust* is nothing else than a delightful piece of musical mosaic, dovetailed together from the compositions of every class of musical composer, right and left, but with so much ingenuity that it presents, especially in the "garden" scene, a perfect picture, brimful of beauty, although somewhat overloaded with a profusion of melody that is at times all but cloying to the senses. It would be impossible to say how many times I have heard the *Faust* since its first production at Her Majesty's Theatre, but rarely have I been disappointed with it, although I have never failed to detect fresh plagiarisms, which, although distinct enough, may be forgiven on account of the admirable manner in which they have been utilised. So great was the success of this opera at Her Majesty's Theatre, that it was mounted "in hot haste" at the Royal Italian Opera towards the end of the season, where it had the advantage of having Madame Miolan-Carvalho as the heroine, who had "created" the part of Margaret in Paris. Tamberlik was but an inefficient Faust, and made nothing of the part; but Faure's Mephistopheles

was so great a manifestation of talent, that it took the town by storm. Graziani was a fair Valentine, but Mdme. Nantier-Didiée by no means hit the salient points of the small *rôle* of Siebel, and in the "garden" scene was utterly at fault.

Mdlle. Artot during this season put in her claim for consideration; but although she was, to all intents and purposes, a genuine *artiste* of the first rank—so singular is the taste of the British public—she never became a favourite.

Nothing remarkable occurred at Her Majesty's Theatre in 1864, beyond the production of M. Gounod's *Mirella*, which proved an utter failure there, as it had done elsewhere. With Nicolai's *Merry Wives of Windsor*, the result was equally unpropitious; whilst at the Royal Italian Opera the revival of Meyerbeer's *L'Etoile du Nord*, with Mdme. Miolan-Carvalho as Catherine, Faure as Peter, Naudin as Danilowitz, and Neri-Beraldi as Georgio, was the sole novelty worth mentioning.

If the operatic events of this year, however, were unimportant, the Birmingham Musical Festival could by no means be classed in the same category; for not only was English music there represented by the production of Mr. H. Smart's cantata, the *Bride of Dunkerron*, and Mr. A. Sullivan's masque, *Kenilworth*, but Mr. Costa produced his second oratorio—for which the Committee had given him a commission—*Naaman*. That work was presented on Wednesday, September 7th, and was interpreted by a galaxy of talent seldom brought together —Mdlle. A. Patti, Mdmes. Sainton-Dolby and Rudersdorff, Miss Palmer, Messrs. Sims Reeves, Cummings, and Santley. I had purposed to have been present on this occasion, as I

had been at the first hearing of *Eli;** but at the last moment I was prevented from fulfilling my intentions. I should, therefore, pass by the introduction of this work to the Birmingham public, were it not much too important to be omitted in any reference to the "Musical Recollections" of the year, and had I not also been present at nearly all the rehearsals, and soon afterwards had the further opportunity of hearing and judging of it for myself, when it was performed in London, and elsewhere in public. Concerning the impression it made, I cannot, therefore, do better than record the opinion —in which I thoroughly coincide—of one who was fully competent to judge of the quality of Mr. Costa's writing, of his elucidation of the subject—which embraced the career of the prophet Elisha—and of the manner in which it was presented under that gentleman's own personal superintendence and direction. "The production of *Naaman*," wrote Mr. H. F. Chorley,† "caused great excitement, furnishing another illustration of the justice of time, to which all who are faithful to themselves and their impressions may trust implicitly. Those who, because *Eli* was not another *Elijah*, nor like it—the very reason which ought to have engaged favour—denounced the oratorio as 'a mere flash in the pan,' 'a flimsy success,' &c., have been compelled to cease their cries of qualification and protest. That that first work was, of its school, a sound and a significant one, we felt from the moment of its appearance —a work which a plaudit more or less could not keep alive, a paragraph more or less could not destroy, but which had a reality within itself. The time which has elapsed since its

* See vol. i. p. 294.

† See *Athenæum* for 1864, pp. 345-6, 378.

production has brought that conviction to the general world of audiences and musicians. Hence a curiosity, favourable rather than malicious, as to the fortune which would attend its composer in that most difficult of ordeals—a *second* oratorio. Signor Costa has not been emboldened by success into temerity. His music, let us say at once, well bears the scrutiny sure to be applied to it, and justifies the expectation raised." "To specify some of the merits which rendered such a triumph inevitable, is now the pleasant task before us. First, it is evident that, while Signor Costa has not attempted to denationalise himself—a fatal expedient, which can have but one issue—he has this time not availed himself of what may be called those picturesque effects of harp and organ which he so happily employed in *Eli;* but has rested his chance of success on what may be called the most solid forms of construction. It would be impossible for the most grudging disciple of Smelfungus to apply the faint praise of 'pretty,' 'slight,' '*ad captandum,*' in this case. Nevertheless, the instrumentation of *Naaman* does not lack variety. It is from first to last admirable—rich without cumbrousness, diversified without eccentricity—showing to advantage every player who takes part in the score, and interesting without in one bar stepping out of its place, as depriving the voices of their rights, which are (a) predominance in musical work, where words and emotions are to be expressed. It cannot be better characterised than as recalling, without servile copying, Cherubini's orchestral writing—the most perfect model, perhaps, which could be named; it having been conceded that in instrumental composition Beethoven is the Shakspeare of music, whom the student may idolise, but who stands above

the reach of all imitators. Then, throughout this oratorio the flow of melody is free and natural, giving the singers all desirable encouragement and possible scope, without condescension to their exactions. If in only one or two places it may be called strikingly original, it is never common, still less theatrical. More might have been adventured in the matter of rhythm. The predominence of *square*, or common *tempo*, in the first part, makes itself felt in a slight heaviness, difficult to account for in music so fluent and so sonorous, till the relief to the ear, in the lovely and tranquil bass song, 'Thy seed shall be prosperous,' makes it clear what we have been waiting for. While enumerating characteristics, let us call attention to one which, for Art's sake, we are glad to see has attracted the attention of a contemporary, and on the great importance of which we have often and again dwelt; that is, the amount of pathos and expression obtained without that perpetual recurrence to the minor keys, in which even the most inane of musical beings, playing at 'high composition,' can get up a show of grief and mystery. *Naaman's* first air is as instructive an example that it is not key, but phrase, dignity of accent, and truth of feeling, which express and excite sorrow, as Handel's two Dead Marches, his prayer, 'Return, O God of hosts,' the air, 'He was despised,' and most of all, perhaps, the lament, 'In sweetest harmony,' from *Saul*. In the strict music which *Naaman* contains, Signor Costa has made a great advance upon his *Eli*. The fugue closing the first part, that winding up the Sanctus of angels, and the final Hallelujah, with the bold and original coda, are full of thought, contrivance, and climax. The last is one of the noblest modern choruses in existence. Mr. Bartholomew's

book does not offer those marked characteristics which tempt a musician when he has not merely to illustrate situations, but to represent individualities. Naaman is not the central figure, there being no possibility of filling out the outline offered, so as to give him the distinctness such a personage demands. Elisha the prophet is from first to last more consistently painted, and so it may be said is Adah, 'the little maid.' The music allotted to her throughout is full of innocent, implicit, loving faith—the faith which 'casteth out fear.' The Shunamite's child has only one song, 'I dreamt I was in heaven,' one of Signor Costa's loveliest songs. The mother is, again, merely the yearning, grief-stricken woman, presented without any variation of the known combinations. But not a juncture which offered the composer a chance has been neglected. It is difficult in no common degree to write a new march for an oratorio; but Signor Costa has done this in his entry of Naaman, using the chorus as an interlude and accessory with the happiest effect." "From the above remarks, from the comparisons offered and the tests proposed, it may be gathered that we have considered this oratorio as a work without reference to the remarkable success which attended its production. Such immediate triumphs are on record, as those won in *David* by Neukomm, who in his hour was called the 'King of Birmingham,' and who, as Mendelssohn has told us in his letters, with all the kindly feeling of a real artist, was there early laid on the shelf of neglect. Again, the Norwich ovations to Spohr, in regard to his *Calvary* and *Babylon*, have not been forgotten while we have been writing the plain history of this week, and attempting to appreciate the new contribution to music which has been one

of its marking features. Signor Costa's *Naaman*, we must emphatically repeat, appears to us a work real in every sense of the word; as such it may, and we hope *will*, stand. There is not a bar in it which can become old-fashioned."

Of 1865 and 1866 still less requires to be mentioned concerning the proceedings of the two opera-houses, except that in the former year Cherubini's *Medea*, with Titiens as the heroine, made a brief sensation at Her Majesty's Theatre, and in the latter Gluck's *Iphigenia in Tauride* did the same; whilst at Covent Garden the appearances of Madame Vilda, who could sing but not act, and Mdlle. Orgeni, who could act but not sing, were the only circumstances that merit any mention.

And here my "Musical Recollections of the last Half Century" must be brought to a conclusion. Had time and space permitted, much more than has been related might have been noted. I might have spoken of various other aspirants for fame, and chronicled the failure of many more than will ever be remembered. The difficulty of dealing with later years has proved to be so much greater than that of my earlier remembrances, that I now lay down my pen, with the hope that, if nothing more has been done, a reliable chronicle of the progress of music during the last half century has at least been written, which will serve as a record in the future, and be the forerunner of the "remembrances" of some other musical enthusiast, who, like myself in the past, may be willing to continue the work in the future. If to my readers this series of papers, the writing of which has been "a labour of love," should prove as interesting as they have been for many months past to myself, I shall indeed find a reward in having been able to amuse them, whilst relating what, I trust, will be found to be

reliable information. When I "call to remembrance" the time over which these "Recollections" have travelled, I can only express my thankfulness that I have been permitted to have had so much rational enjoyment in my past life, and that I am still able to note, and I trust to appreciate, the efforts that are made, and making, to show that my countrymen are not so much behind the age, as it is constantly asserted they are, with respect to musical advancement; and that they will bear a fair and just comparison—not to their disadvantage, but to their credit—with every other nation where the art is cultivated and the science is studied.

THE END.

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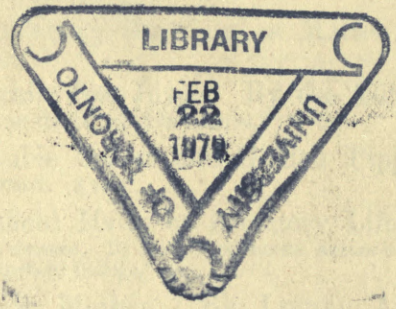
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